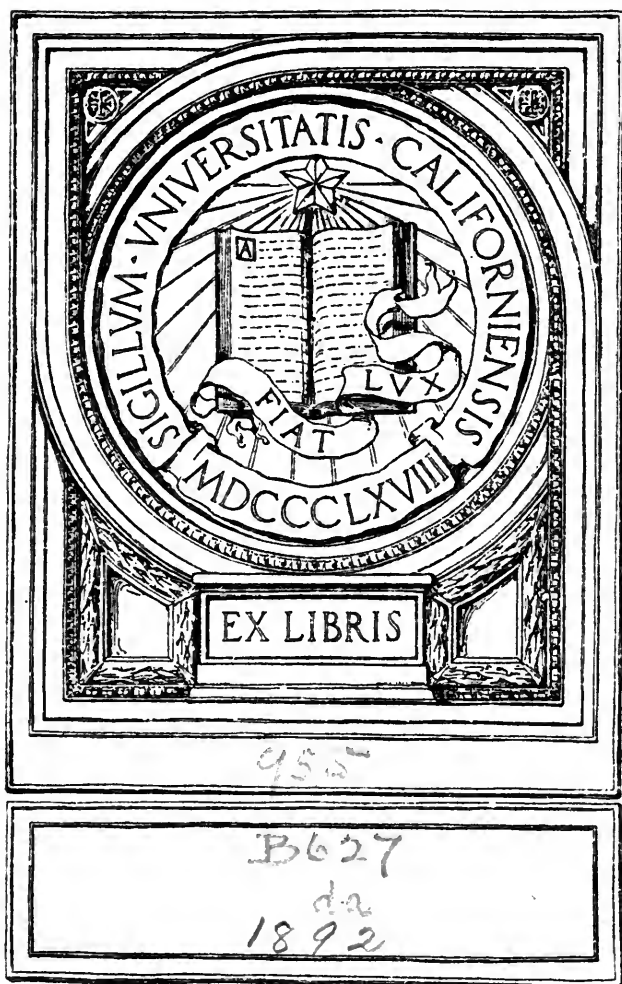


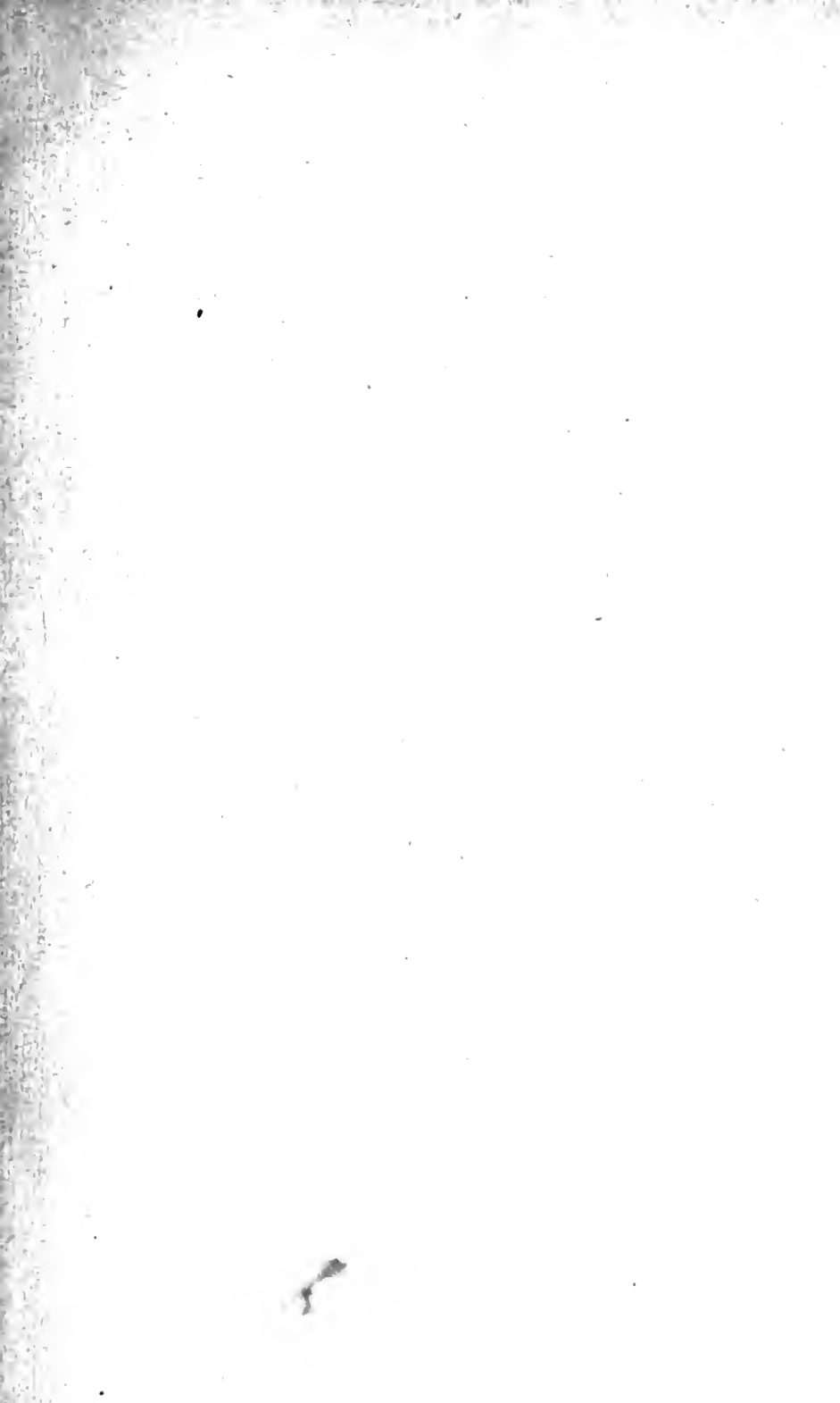
UC-NRLF

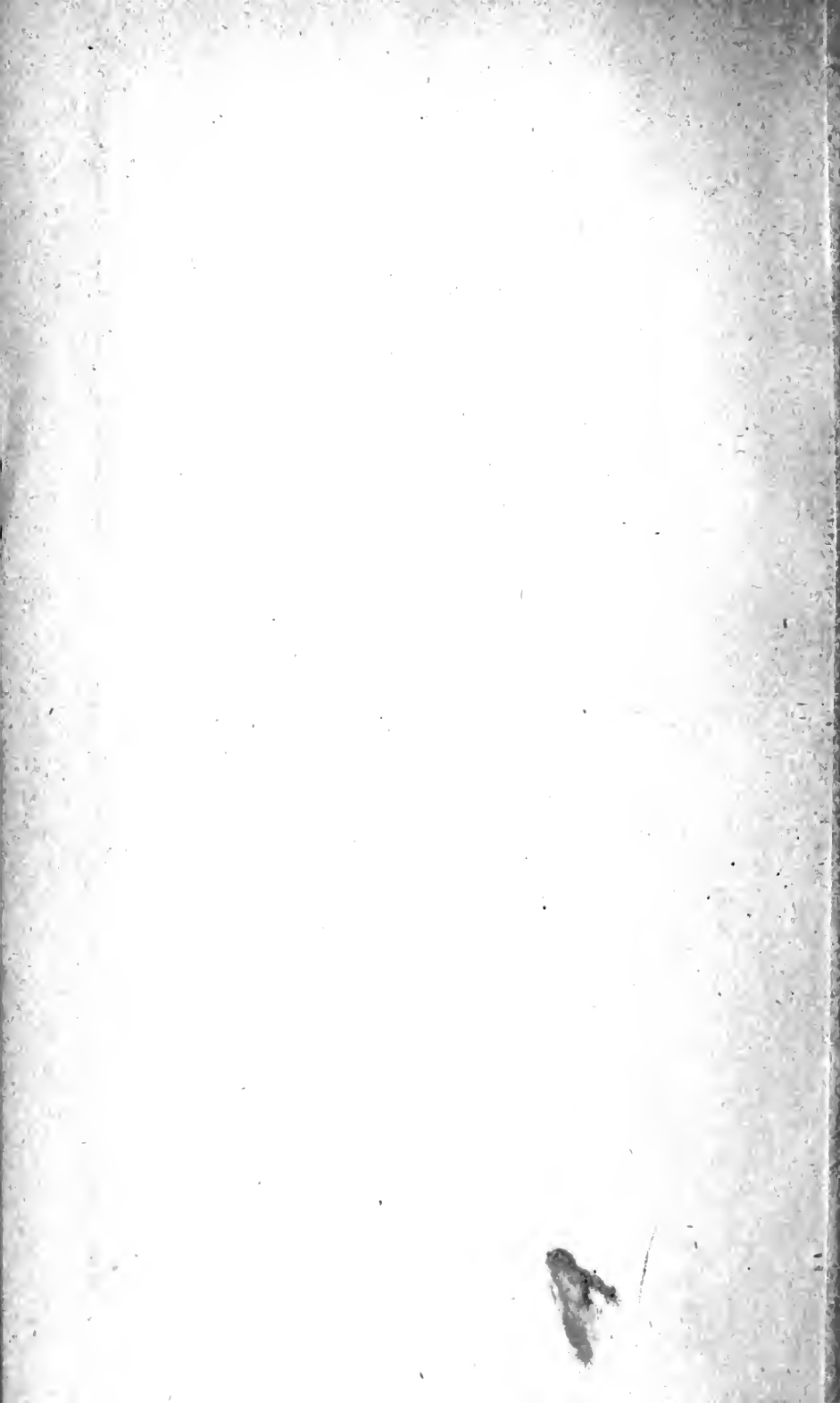


\$B 249 594

40









Yours very faithfully,
William Black.

Portrait photograph by Elliott & Bay

Photographer New York

A

DAUGHTER OF HETH

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

"If Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these
which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life
do me?"

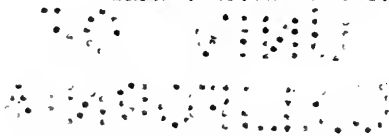
NEW AND REVISED EDITION

NEW YORK: HARPER AND BROTHERS

1892

LONDON :

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.



PREFATORY NOTE.

I have long wished to place before the public an edition of these novels of mine which should have at least the mechanical merit of uniformity. Also I had in contemplation, especially with regard to the earlier volumes, a large measure of re-shaping and re-writing ; so that books composed amid stress and turmoil might gain something from the comparative leisure of later years. But this wider project I found impracticable. For one thing, it would have taken a few lifetimes to accomplish ; then again, it was just possible that a certain freshness and rudeness of touch might have been ill replaced by a nicer precision. Nevertheless in many minor ways these pages have now been thoroughly revised ; verbal and other inaccuracies have been corrected ; crooked places have been made straight ; conversations condensed ; while a considerable number of those little playfulnesses which the printer somehow mysteriously manages, when one is not watching, to introduce into the text, have been removed. It only remains for me, in submitting this new series to the reading public, to express my deep sense of gratitude for the constant favour and kindness I have already and for so long a time experienced at their hands.

W. B.

London, January, 1892.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

CONTENTS.



CHAP.	PAGE
I.—COQUETTE'S ARRIVAL	1
II.—COQUETTE'S RELIGION	6
III.—A PENITENT	14
IV.—AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR	22
V.—COQUETTE'S MUSIC	28
VI.—EARLSHOPE	36
VII.—THE CRUCIFIX	42
VIII.—SALTCOATS	47
IX.—COQUETTE'S PROMISE	55
X.—THE SCHOOLMASTER	60
XI.—A MEETING ON THE MOOR	68
XII.—COQUETTE'S CONQUESTS	75
XIII.—A HOROSCOPE	81
XIV.—SIR PETER AND LADY DRUM	85
XV.—A DANGEROUS ADVENTURE	94
XVI.—COQUETTE LEAVES AIRLIE	102
XVII.—LOCHFYNE.	107
XVIII.—COQUETTE SAILS TO THE NORTH	113
XIX.—COQUETTE DISCOURSES	121
XX.—LETTERS FROM AIRLIE	126
XXI.—COQUETTE IS TROUBLED	134
XXII.—ON THE SEASHORE	141
XXIII.—COQUETTE BEGINS TO FEAR	146
XXIV.—TOUCHING CERTAIN PROBLEMS	151
XXV.—COQUETTE'S PRESENTIMENTS	157
XXVI.—CONFESSION AT LAST	163
XXVII.—LOIN DE FRANCE	170
XXVIII.—AFTER MANY DAYS	176
XXIX.—COQUETTE'S DREAMS	181
XXX.—ON THE WAY	188
XXXI.—AN AWFUL VISITOR	193

CHAP.	PAGE
XXXII.—IN THE SPRINGTIME	201
XXXIII.—OVER THE MOOR	204
XXXIV.—LORD EARLSHOPE'S CAVE	210
XXXV.—THE NEMESIS OF LOVE	215
XXXVI.—THE LAST DAY AT AIRLIE	221
XXXVII.—COQUETTE IN TOWN	226
XXXVIII.—ALL ABOUT KELVIN-SIDE	233
XXXIX.—LADY DRUM'S DINNER-PARTY	238
XL.—THE ROSEBUD	245
XLI.—THE WHAUP BECOMES ANXIOUS	250
XLII.—AT THE THEATRE	255
XLIII.—COQUETTE IS TOLD	262
XLIV.—COQUETTE'S FOREBODINGS	271
XLV.—A LEGEND OF EARLSHOPE	274
XLVI.—THE MINISTER'S PUBLISHER.	280
XLVII.—AN APPARITION.	287
XLVIII.—EARLSHOPE IS INVADED	291
XLIX.—COQUETTE'S SONG	295
L.—COQUETTE FORSAKES HER FRIENDS	300
LI.—A SECRET OF THE SEA	309
LII.—CONSENT	313
LIII.—THE PALE BRIDE	320
LIV.—HUSBAND AND WIFE	326
LV.—THE CHURCHYARD ON THE MOOR	333

A DAUGHTER OF HETH

CHAPTER I.

COQUETTE'S ARRIVAL.

THE tide of battle had flowed onward from the village to the Manse. The retreating party, consisting of the Minister's five sons, were driven back by force of numbers, contesting every inch of the ground. Hope had deserted them ; and there now remained to them but the one chance—to reach the fortress of the Manse in safety, and seek the shelter of its great stone wall.

The enemy numbered over a dozen ; and the clangour and clamour of the pursuit waxed stronger as they pressed on the small and compact body of five. The weapons on both sides were stones picked up from the moorland road ; and the terrible aim of the Whaup—the eldest of the Minister's boys—had disfigured more than one mother's son of the turbulent crowd that pursued. He alone—a long-legged Herculean lad of eighteen—kept in front of his retreating brothers, facing the foe boldly, and directing his swift, successive discharges with a deadly accuracy of curve upon the noses of the foremost. But his valour was of no avail. All seemed over. Their courage began to partake of the recklessness of despair. Nature seemed to sympathise with this disastrous fate ; and to the excited eyes of the fugitives it appeared that the sun was overcast—that the moor around was blacker and more silent than ever—and that the far stretch of the sea, with the gloomy hills of Arran, had grown dark as if with a coming storm. Thus does the

human mind confer an anthropomorphic sentiment on all things, animate and inanimate : a profound observation which occurred to Mr. Gillespie, the Schoolmaster, who, being on one occasion in the town of Ayr, when horse-racing or some such godless diversion was going forward, and having, in a very small and crowded hostelry, meekly enquired for some boiled eggs, was thus indignantly remonstrated with by the young woman in charge : “ Losh bless me ! Do ye think the hens can remember to lay eggs in all this bustle and hurry ! ”

Finally, the retreating party turned and ran—ignominiously, pell-mell—until they had gained the high stone wall surrounding the Manse. They darted into the garden, slammed the door to, and barricaded it ; the Whaup sending up a peal of defiant laughter that made the solemn echoes of the old-fashioned house ring again. Outside this shriek of joy was taken as a challenge ; and the party on the other side of the wall returned a roar of mingled mockery and anger which was not pleasant to hear. It meant a blockade and bombardment ; with perhaps a fierce assault when the patience of the besiegers should give way. But the Whaup was not of a kind to indulge in indolent security when his enemies were murmuring hard by. In an incredibly short space of time he and his brothers had wheeled up to the wall a couple of empty barrels, and across these was hurriedly thrown a broad plank. The Whaup filled his hands with the gravel of the garden walk, and jumped up on the board. The instant that his head appeared above the wall, there was a yell of execration. He had just time to discharge his two handfuls of gravel upon the besiegers, when a shower of stones was directed at him, and he ducked his head.

“ This is famous ! ” he cried. “ This is grand ! It beats Josephus ! Mair gravel, Jock—mair gravel, Jock ! ”

Now, in the Manse of Airlie, there was an edition of Josephus’ works, in several volumes, which was the only profane reading allowed to the boys on Sunday. Consequently it was much studied—especially the plates of it ; and one of these plates represented the siege of Jerusalem, with the Romans being killed by stones thrown from the wall. No sooner, therefore, had the Whaup mounted on the

empty barrels, than his brothers recognised the position. They were called upon to engage in a species of warfare familiar to them. They formed themselves into line, and handed up to the Whaup successive supplies of stones and gravel, with a precision they could not have exceeded had they actually served in one of the legions of Titus.

The Whaup, however, dared not discharge his ammunition with regularity. He had to descend to feints ; for he was in a most perilous position, and might at any moment have had his head rendered amorphous. He therefore from time to time showed his hand over the wall ; the expected volley of stones followed ; and then he sprang up to return the compliment with all his might. Howls of rage greeted each of his efforts ; and, indeed, the turmoil rose to an extraordinary pitch. The besiegers were furious. They were in an open position, while their foe was well intrenched ; and no man can get a handful of gravel pitched into his face, and also preserve his temper. Revenge was out of the question. The sagacious Whaup never appeared when they expected him ; and when he did appear, it was an instantaneous up and down, giving them no chance at all of doing him an injury. They raved and stormed ; and the more bitterly they shouted names at him, and the more fiercely they heaped insults upon him, the more joyously he laughed. The noise, without and within, was appalling ; never, in the memory of man, had such an uproar resounded around the quiet Manse of Airlie.

Suddenly there was a scared silence within the walls, and a rapid disappearance of the younger of the besieged.

"Oh, Tam, here's faither !" cried one.

But Tam—elsewhere named the Whaup—was too excited to hear. He was shouting and laughing, hurling gravel and stones at his enemies, when——

When a tall, stern-faced, grey-haired man, who wore a rusty black coat and a white neckcloth, and who bore in his hand, ominously, a horsewhip, walked firmly and sedately across the garden. The hero of the day was still on the barrels, taunting his foes, and helping himself to the store of ammunition which his colleagues had piled upon the plank.

"Who's lang-leggit now ? Where are the Minister's

chickens now? Why dinna you go and wash your noses in the burn?"

The next moment the Whaup uttered what can only be described as a squeal. He had not been expecting an attack from the rear; and there was fright as well as pain in the yell which followed the startling cut across the legs which brought him down. In fact, the lithe curl of the whip round his calves was at once a mystery and a horror; and he tumbled rather than jumped from the plank, only to find himself confronted by his father, whose threatening eye and terrible voice soon explained the mystery.

"How daur ye, sir," exclaimed Mr. Cassilis, "how daur ye, sir, transform my house into a Bedlam! For shame, sir, that your years have brought ye no more sense than to caper wi' a lot of schoolboys. Have ye no more respect for yourself—have ye no more respect for the college you have come home from—than to behave yourself like a farm-callant, and make yourself the byword of the neighbourhood? You are worse than the youngest in the house——"

"I didn't know you were in the Manse," said the Whaup, wondering whither his brothers had run.

"So much the worse—so much the worse," said the Minister, severely, "that ye have no better guide to your conduct than the fear o' being caught. Why, sir, when I was your age, I was busier with my Greek Testament than with flinging names at a wheen laddies!"

"It was mair than names, as ye might hae seen," remarked the Whaup, confidently.

Indeed, he was incorrigible, and the Minister turned away. His eldest son had plenty of brains, plenty of courage, and an excellent physique; but he could not be brought to acquire a sense of the proper gravity or duties of manhood, nor yet could he be prevailed on to lay aside the mischievous tricks of his youth. He was the terror of the parish. It was hoped that a winter at Glasgow University would tame down the Whaup; but he returned to Airlie worse than ever, and formed his innocent brothers into a regular band of marauders, of whom all honest people were afraid. The long-legged daredevil of the Manse, with his boldness, his cunning, and his agility, left neither garden, nor farinyard, nor kitchen alone. Worthy villagers were

tripped up by bits of invisible twine. Mysterious knocks on the window woke them at the dead of night. When they were surprised that the patience of their sitting hen did not meet with its usual reward, they found that chalk eggs had been substituted for the natural ones. Their cats came home with walnut-shells on their feet. Stable doors were unaccountably opened. Furious bulls were found lassoed, so that no man dare approach them. The work of the Whaup was everywhere evident—it was always the Whaup. And then that young gentleman would come quietly into the villagers' houses, and chat pleasantly with them, and confide to them his great grief that his younger brother, Wattie—notwithstanding that people thought him a quiet, harmless, pious, and rather sneaking boy—was such a desperate hand for mischief. Some believed him; others reproached him for his wickedness in blaming his own sins upon the only one of the Minister's family who had an appearance of Christian humility and grace.

When the Minister had gone into the house, the Whaup—in nowise downcast by his recent misfortune, although he still was aware of an odd sensation about the legs—mounted once more upon the barrels to reconnoitre the enemy. He had no wish to renew the fight; for Saturday was his father's day for study and meditation; no stir or sound was allowed in the place from morning till night; and certainly, had the young gentlemen of the Manse known that their father was indoors, they would have let the village boys rave outside in safety. Cool and confident as he was, the Whaup did not care to bring his father out a second time; and so he got up on the barricades merely for the sake of information.

The turmoil had evidently quieted down, partly through the ignominious silence of the besieged, and partly through the appearance of a new object of public attention. The heads of the dozen lads outside were now turned towards the village, whence there was seen coming along the road the Minister's dog-cart, driven by his ancient henchman, Andrew Bogue. Beside the driver sat some fair creature in fluttering white and yellow—an apparition that seldom met the vision of the inhabitants of Airlie. The Whaup knew that this young lady was his cousin from France, who was

now, being an orphan, and having completed her education, coming to live at the Manse. But who was the gentleman behind, who sat with his arm flung carelessly over the bar, while he smiled and chatted to the girl, who had half turned round to listen to him?

"Why, it is Lord Earlshope," said the Whaup, with his handsome face suddenly assuming a frown. "What business has Earlshope to talk to my cousin?"

Presently the gentleman let himself down from the dog-cart, took off his hat to her who had been his companion, and turned and went along the road again. The dog-cart drove up to the door. The Whaup, daring his enemies to touch him, went out boldly, and proceeded to welcome the new-comer to Airlic.

"I suppose you are my cousin," he said.

"I suppose I am," said the young girl, speaking with an accent so markedly French that he looked at her in astonishment. But then she, in turn, regarded him for a moment with a pair of soft dark eyes, and he forgot her accent. He vaguely knew that she had smiled to him; and that the effect of the smile was rather bewildering—as he assisted her down from the dog-cart, and begged her to come in through the garden.

CHAPTER II.

COQUETTE'S RELIGION.

THE Whaup was convinced that he had never seen upon earth, nor yet in his Sunday-morning dreams of what heaven might be like, any creature half so beautiful, and bewitching, and graceful, as the young girl who now walked beside him. Yet he could not tell in what lay her especial charm; for, regarding her with the eye of a critic, the Whaup observed that she was full of defects. Her face was pale and French-looking; and, instead of the rosy bloom of a pretty country lass, there was a tinge of southern sun over her complexion. Then her hair was in obvious disorder—some ragged ends of silky brown, scattered over her forehead in Sir Peter Lely fashion, being surmounted by a piece of yellow silk ribbon; while there were big masses behind that

only partially revealed a shapely neck. Then her eyes, though they were dark and expressive, had nothing of the keen and merry look of your bouncing country belle. Nor was there anything majestic in her appearance; although, to be sure, she walked with an ease and grace which gave even to an observer a sense of suppleness and pleasure. Certainly, it was not her voice which had captivated him; for when he at first heard her absurd accent, he had nearly burst out laughing. Notwithstanding all which, when she turned the pale, pretty, foreign face to him, and when she said, with a smile that lit up the dark eyes and showed a glimpse of pearly teeth—"It rains not always in your country, then?"—he remarked no stiffness in her speech, but thought she spoke in music. He could scarcely answer her. He had already succumbed to the spell of the soft eyes and the winning voice that had earned for this young lady, when she was but four years of age, the unfair name of Coquette.

"Do you know Lord Earlshope?" he said, abruptly.

She turned to him with a brief glance of surprise. It seemed to him that every alteration in her manner—and every new position of her figure—was an improvement.

"That gentleman who did come with us? No; I do not know him."

"You were talking to him as if you did know him very well," said the Whaup, sternly. He was beginning to suspect this cousin of his of being a deceitful young person.

"I had great pleasure of speaking to him. He speaks French—he is very agreeable."

"Look here," said the Whaup, with a sudden knitting of his brow, "I won't have you talk to Earlshope, if you live in this house. Now, mind!"

"What!" she cried, with a look of amused wonder, "I do think you are jealous of me already. You will make me—what is it called? *vaniteuse*. Is it not a lark!"

She smiled as she looked at her new cousin. The Whaup began to recall German legends of the devil appearing in the shape of a beautiful woman.

"Ladies in this country don't use expressions like that,"

said he ; adding scornfully, " If that is a French custom, you'd better forget it."

" Is it not right to say ' a lark ? ' " she asked, gravely. " Papa used to say that, and mamma and I got much of our English from him. I will not say it again, if you wish."

" Did you call it English ? " said the Whaup, with some contempt.

At this moment the Minister came out from the door of the Manse, and approached his niece. She ran to him, took both his hands in hers, and then suddenly, and somewhat to his discomfiture, kissed him ; while in the excitement of the moment she forgot to speak her broken English, and showered upon him a series of pretty phrases and questions in French.

" Dear me ! " he observed, in a bewildered way.

" She is a witch," said the Whaup to himself, standing by, and observing with an angry satisfaction that this incomprehensible foreigner, no matter what she did or said, was momentarily growing more graceful. The charm of her appearance increased with every new look of her face, with every new gesture of her head. And when she suddenly seemed to perceive that her uncle had not understood a word of her tirade—and when, with a laugh and a blush, she threw out her pretty hands in a dramatic way, and gave ever so slight a shrug with her small shoulders—the picture of her confusion and embarrassment was perfect.

" Oh, she is an actress—I hate actresses ! " said the Whaup.

Meanwhile his cousin recovered herself and began to translate into stiff and curious English (watching her pronunciation carefully) the rapid French she had been pouring out. But her uncle interrupted her, and said—

" Come into the house first, my bairn, and we will have the story of your journey afterwards. Dear me, I began to think ye could speak nothing but that unintelligible Babel o' a tongue."

So he led her into the house, the Whaup following ; and Catherine Cassilis, whom they had been taught by letter to call Coquette, looked round upon her new home.

She was the only daughter of the Minister's only brother, a young man who had left Scotland in his teens, and never

returned. He had been such another as the Whaup in his youth, only that his outrages upon the decorum of his native village had been of a somewhat more serious kind. His family were very glad when he went abroad; and when they did subsequently hear of him they heard no good. Indeed, a very moderate amount of wildishness became something terrible when rumoured through the quiet of Airlie; and the younger Cassilis was looked on as the prodigal son, whom no one was anxious to see again. At length the news came that he had married some foreign woman—and this put a climax to his wickedness. It is true that the captain of a Greenock ship, having been at St. Nazaire, had there met Mr. Cassilis, who had taken his countryman home to his house, some few miles further along the banks of the Loire. The captain carried to Greenock, and to Airlie, the news that the Minister's brother was the most fortunate of men. The French lady he had married was of the most gracious temperament, and had the sweetest looks. She had brought her husband a fine estate on the Loire, where he lived like a foreign prince, not like the brother of a parish minister. They had a daughter—an elf, a fairy, with dark eyes and witching ways—who lisped French with the greatest ease in the world. Old Gavin Cassilis, the Minister, heard, and was secretly rejoiced. He corresponded, in his grave and formal fashion, with his brother; but he would not undertake a voyage to a country that had abandoned itself to infidelity. The Minister knew no France but the France of the Revolution time; and so powerfully had he been impressed in his youth by the stories of the worship of the Goddess of Reason, that, while the ancient languages were as familiar to him as his own, while he knew enough of Italian to read the *Inferno*, and had mastered even the technicalities of the German theologians, nothing would ever induce him to study French. It was a language abhorred—it had lent itself to the most monstrous apostacy of recent times.

The mother and father of Coquette died within a few hours of each other, cut off by a fever which was raging over the south of France; and the girl, according to their wish, was sent to a school in the neighbourhood, where she remained until she was eighteen. She was then transferred

to the care of her only living relative—Mr. Gavin Cassilis, the parish Minister of Airlie. She had never seen anything of Scotland or of her Scotch relations. The life that awaited her was quite unknown to her. She had no dread of the possible consequences of removing her thoroughly southern nature into the chiller social atmosphere of the north. So far, indeed, her journey had been a pleasant one; and she saw nothing to make her apprehensive of the future. She had been met at the railway station by the Minister's man, Andrew; but she had no opportunity of noticing his more than gloomy temperament, or the scant civility he was inclined to bestow on a foreign jade who was dressed so that all the men turned and looked at her as though she had been a snare of Satan. For they had scarcely left the station, and were making their way upward to the higher country, when they overtook Lord Earlshope, who was riding leisurely along. Andrew—much as he contemned the young nobleman, who had not the best of reputations in the district—touched his cap, as in duty bound. His lordship glanced with a look of surprise and involuntary admiration at the young lady who sat on the dog-cart; and then rode forward, and said—

“May I have the pleasure of introducing myself to Mr. Cassilis' niece? I hope I am not mistaken.”

With a frankness which appalled Andrew—who considered this boldness on the part of an unmarried woman to be indicative of the licentiousness of French manners—the young lady replied; and in a few minutes Lord Earlshope had succeeded in drawing her into a pleasant conversation in her own tongue. Nay, when they had reached Earlshope, he insisted that Miss Cassilis should enter the gate and drive through the park, which ran parallel with the road. He himself was forced to leave his horse with the lodge-keeper, the animal having mysteriously become lame on ascending the hill; but, with a careless apology and a laugh, the fair-haired young gentleman jumped on to the dog-cart behind, and begged Andrew for a “lift” as far as the Manse.

Andrew thought it was none of his business. Had his companion been an ordinarily sober and discreet young woman, he would not have allowed her to talk so familiarly

with this graceless young lord ; but, said the Minister's man to himself, they were well met.

"They jabbered away in their foreign lingo," said Andrew, that evening, to his wife Leezibeth, the house-keeper, "and I'm thinking it was siccah a language was talked in Sodom and Gomorrah. And he was a' smiles, and she was a' smiles; and they seemed to think nae shame o' themselves, goin' through a decent country-side. It's a dispensation, Leezibeth ; that's what it is—a dispensation—this hussy coming amang us wi' her French silks and her satins, and her deevlish license o' talkin' like a play-actor."

"Andrew, my man," said Leezibeth, with a touch of spite (for she had become rather a partisan of the stranger), "she'll no be the only lang tongue we hae in the parish. And what ails ye at her talking, if ye dinna understand it? As for her silks and her satins, the Queen on the throne couldna set them off better."

"Didna I tell ye !" said Andrew, eagerly, "the carnal eye is attracted already. She has cast her wiles owre ye, Leezibeth. It's a temptation."

"Will the body be quiet !" said Leezibeth, with rising anger. "He's fair out o' his wits to think that a woman come to my time o' life should be thinking o' silks and satins for mysel'. 'Deed, Andrew, there's no much fear o' my spending siller on finery, when ye never see a bawbee without running for an auld stocking to hide it in !"

Oddly enough, Andrew was at first the only one of them who apprehended any evil from the arrival of the young girl who had come to pass her life among people very dissimilar from herself. The simplicity and frankness of her manner towards Lord Earlshope he exaggerated into nothing short of license ; and his "dour" imagination had already perceived in her some strange resemblance to the Scarlet Woman, the Mother of Abominations, who sat on the seven hills and mocked at the saints. Andrew was a morbid and morose man, of Seceder descent ; and he had inherited a tinge of the old Cameronian feeling, not often met with now-a-days. He felt it incumbent on him to be a sort of living protest in the Manse against the temporising and feeble condition of theological opinion he found there. He looked upon Mr. Cassilis as little else than a "Moderate ;"

and even made bold, upon rare occasions, to confront the Minister himself.

"Andrew," said Mr. Cassilis one day, "you are a rebellious servant, and one that would intemperately disturb the peace o' the Church."

"In nowise, Minister, in nowise," retorted Andrew, with firmness. "But in maitters spiritual I will yield obedience to no man. There is but one King in Sion, sir, for a' that a dominant and Erastian Estayblishment may say."

"Toots, toots," said the Minister, testily. "Let the Establishment alone, Andrew. It does more good than harm, surely."

"Maybe, maybe," replied Andrew (with an uncomfortable feeling that the Establishment had supplied him with the carnal advantages of a good situation), "but I am not wan that would rub out the ancient landmarks o' the faith which our fathers suffered for, and starved for, and bled for. The auld religion is dying out owre fast as it is, but there is still a remnant o' Jacob among the Gentiles, and they are not a' like Nicodemus, that was ashamed o' the truth that was in him, and bided until the nicht."

It was well, therefore, that this fearless denouncer did not hear the following conversation which took place between the Minister and his niece. The latter had been conducted by Leezibeth to see the rooms prepared for her. With these she was highly delighted. A large chamber, which had served as a dormitory for the boys, was now transformed into a sitting-room for her, and the boys' beds had been carried into a neighbouring hayloft, which had been cleared out for the purpose. In this sitting-room she found her piano, which had been sent on some days before, and a number of other treasures from her southern home. There were two small square windows in the room; and they looked down upon the garden, with its moss-grown wall, and, beyond that, over a corner of Airlie moor, and, beyond that again, towards the sloping and wooded country which stretched away to the western coast. A faint grey breadth of sea was visible there; and the island of Arran, with its peaked mountains grown a pale, transparent blue, lay along the horizon.

"Ye might hae left that music-box in France," said Leezibeth. "It's better fitted for there than here."

"I could not live without it," said Coquette, with a quiet smile.

"Then I'd advise ye no to open it the-day, which is a day o' preparation for the solemn services o' the Sabbath. The denner is on the table, miss."

The young lady went down-stairs and took her place at the table, all the boys staring at her with open mouth and eyes. It was during her talk with the Minister that she casually made a remark about "the last time she had gone to mass."

Consternation sat upon every face. Even the Minister looked shocked, and asked her if she had been brought up a Roman.

"A Catholic? Yes," said Coquette, simply, and yet looking strangely at the faces of the boys. They had never before had a Catholic come among them unawares.

"I am deeply grieved and pained," said the Minister, gravely. "I knew not that my brother had been a pervert from the communion of our Church——"

"Papa was not a Catholic," said Coquette. "Mamma and I were. But it matters nothing. I will go to your church—it is the same to me."

"But," said the Minister, in amazement and horror, "it is worse that you should be so indifferent than that you should be a Catholic. Have you never been instructed as to the all-importance of your religious faith?"

"I do not know much—but I will learn, if you please," she said. "I have only tried to be kind to the people around me—that is all. I will learn if you will teach me. I will be what you like."

"Her ignorance is lamentable," muttered the Minister to himself; and the boys looked at her askance and with fear. Perhaps she was a secret friend and ally of the Pope himself.

But the Whaup, who had been inclined to show an independent contempt for his new cousin, no sooner saw her get into trouble, than he startled everybody by exclaiming, warmly—

"She has got the best part of all religions, if she does her best to the people round about her."

"Thomas," said the Minister, severely, "you are not competent to judge of these things."

But Coquette looked at the lad, and saw that his face was burning; and she thanked him with her expressive eyes. Another such glance would have made the Whaup forswear his belief in the Gunpowder Plot; and as it was, he began to cherish wild notions about Roman Catholicism. That was the first result of Coquette's arrival at Airlie.

CHAPTER III.

A PENITENT.

WHEN, on the Sunday morning, Coquette, having risen, dressed, and come into her sitting-room, went forward to one of the small windows, she uttered a cry of delight. She had no idea that the surroundings of her new home were so beautiful. Outside the bright sunlight of the morning fell on the Minister's garden and orchard—a somewhat tangled mass, it is true, of flower beds and apple trees, with patches of cabbage, pease, and other kitchen stuff filling up every corner. A white rose-tree nearly covered the wall of the Manse, and hung its leaves and blooms round the two windows; and when she opened one of these to let the fresh air rush in, there was a fragrance that filled the room in a second.

But far beyond the precincts of the Manse stretched a great landscape, so spacious, so varied, so graduated in hue and tone that her eye ran over it with an ever-increasing delight and wonder. First, the sea. Just over the mountains of the distant island of Arran—a spectral blue mass lying along the horizon—there was a confusion of clouds that let the sunlight fall down on the plain of water in misty, slanting lines. The plain was dark, except where those rays smote it sharp and clear, glimmering in silver; while a black steamer, a mere speck, slowly crept across the lines of blinding light. Down in the south there was a small grey cloud, the size of a man's hand, resting on the water; but she did not know that that was the rock of Ailsa. Then, nearer shore the blue sea fringed with white

ran into two long bays, bordered by a waste of ruddy sand ; and above the largest of these great bays she saw a thin line of dark houses and gleaming slates, stretching from the old-world town of Saltcoats up to its more modern suburb of Ardrossan, where a small fleet of coasting vessels rocked in the harbour. So near were these houses to the water that, from where Coquette stood, they seemed a black fringe or breastwork to the land ; and the spire of Saltcoats church, rising from above the slates, was sharply defined against the wide and windy breadth of waves.

Then inland. Her room looked south ; and before her stretched the fair and fertile valleys and hills of Ayrshire—undulating heights and hollows, intersected by dark green lines of copse running down to the sea. The red flames of the Stevenston ironworks flickered in the daylight ; a mist of blue smoke hung over Irvine and Troon ; and, had her eyes known where to look, she might have caught the pale grey glimmer of the houses of Ayr. As the white clouds sailed across the sky, azure shadows crept across the variegated landscape, momentarily changing its many hues and colours ; and while some dark wood would suddenly deepen in gloom, lo ! beside it, some hitherto unperceived corn-field would as suddenly burst out in a gleam of yellow, burning like gold.

So still it was on this quiet Sunday morning, that she could hear the “click” of a grasshopper on the warm gravel outside, and the hum of a passing bee as it buried itself in one of the white roses, and then flew on. Nay, as she continued gazing away towards the south, it seemed to her she could hear more. Was not that the plashing of the sea on the sunny coast of France ? Was not that the sound of chanting in the small chapel at Le Croisic, out there at the point of land that runs into the sea above the estuary of the Loire ? Her mental vision followed the line of coast running inward—passing the quaint houses and the great building yards of St. Nazaire—and then, as she followed the windings of the broad blue river, she came to her own home, high up on the bank, overlooking the islands on the stream and the lower land and green woods beyond.

“If I had a pair of wings,” she said, with a laugh, “I

would fly ayvay." She had determined she would always speak English now, even to herself.

She went to her piano and sat down and began to sing the old and simple air that she had sung when she left her southern home. She sang of "Normandie, ma Normandie;" and the sensitive thrill of a rich and soft contralto voice lent a singular pathos to the air, although she had gone to the piano chiefly from lightness of heart. Now it happened that the Whaup was passing the foot of the stair leading up to her room. At first he could not believe his ears that any one was actually singing a profane song on the Sabbath morning; but no sooner had he heard "O Normandie, ma Normandie!" than he flew up the stairs, three steps at a bound, to stop such wickedness.

She did not sing loudly, but he thought he had never heard such singing. He paused for a moment at the top of the stair. He listened, and succumbed to the temptress. The peculiar penetrating *timbre* of the contralto voice pierced him and fixed him there, so that he forgot all about his well-meant interference. He listened breathlessly, and with a certain amount of awe, as if it had been vouchsafed to him to hear the chanting of angels. He remembered no more that it was sinful; and when the girl ceased, it seemed to him there was a terrible void in the silence, which was almost misery.

Presently her fingers touched the keys again. What was this now that filled the air with a melody which had a strange distance and unearthliness about it? She had begun to play one of Mozart's sonatas, and was playing it carelessly enough; but the Whaup had never heard anything like it before. It seemed to him to open with the sad stateliness of a march, and he could almost hear in it the tread of aerial hosts; then there was a suggestion of triumph and joy, subsiding again into that plaintive and measured cadence. It was full of dreams and mystery to him; he knew no longer that he was in a Scotch Manse. But when the girl within the room broke into the rapidity of the first variation, and was indeed provoked into giving some attention to her playing, he was recalled to himself. He had been deluded by the devil. He would no longer permit this thing to go on unchecked. And it is probable he would at

once have opened the door and charged her to desist, but from a sneaking hope that she might play something more intelligible to him than these variations, which he regarded as impudent and paganish—the original melody playing hide-and-seek with you in a demoniac fashion, and laughing at you from behind a corner, when you thought you had secured it. He was lingering in this uncertain way when Leezibeth dashed up the stairs. She saw him standing there, listening, and threw a glance of contempt upon him. She banged the door open, and advanced into the room.

“Preserve us a’, lassie, do ye think what ye’re doing? Do ye no ken this is the Sabbath, and that you’re in a respectable house?”

The girl turned round with more wonder than alarm in her face.

“Is it not right to play music on Sunday?”

“Sunday! Sunday!” exclaimed Leezibeth, who was nearly choking, partly from excitement and partly from having rushed upstairs; “your heathenish gibberish accords weel wi’ sic conduct! There is nae Sunday for us. We are no worshippers o’ Bel and the Dragon; and dinna ye tell me that the dochter o’ the minister’s brither doesna ken that it is naething less than heathenish to turn a sober and respectable house into a Babel o’ a theatre on a Sabbath morning——”

At this moment the Whaup made his appearance, with his eyes aflame.

“Plenty, plenty, Leezibeth!” said he, standing out in the middle of the floor.

“Ma certes,” said Leezibeth, turning on her new enemy, “and this is a pretty pass! Is there to be nae order in the house because ye are a’ won ower by a smooth face and a pair o’ glintin’ een? Is the Manse to be tumbled tapsalteery, and made a byword o’ because o’ a foreign hussy?”

“Leezibeth,” said the Whaup, “as sure’s death, if ye say another word to my cousin, ye’ll gang fleein’ down that stair quicker than ever ye came up! Do ye hear?”

Leezibeth threw up her hands, and went away. The Manse would soon be no longer fit for a respectable woman to live in. Singing, and dancing, and play-acting on the

Sabbath morning—after all, Andrew was right. It would have been a merciful dispensation if the boat that brought this Jezebel to the country had foundered in sight of its shores.

Then the Whaup turned to Coquette.

"Look here," said he, "I don't mean to get into trouble more nor I can help. Leezibeth is an authority in the Manse, and ye'll hae to make friends wi' her. Don't you imagine you can play music here or do what ye like on the Sabbath; for you'll have to be like the rest—gudeness gracious! what are ye crying for?"

"I do not know," she said, turning her head aside. "I thank you for your kindness to me."

"Oh," said he, with a tremendous flush of red to his face—for her tears had made him valiant—"is that all? Look here, you can depend on me. When you get into trouble, send for me. If any man or woman in Airlie says a word to you, by jingo! I'll punch their head!"

And thereupon she turned and looked at him with laughter like sunshine struggling through the tears in her eyes.

"Is it English—*ponche sare hade*?"

"Not as you pronounce it," he said, coolly. "But as I should show them, if they interfered wi' you, it's very good English, and Scotch, and Irish all put together."

On Sunday morning Mr. Cassilis had his breakfast by himself in his study. The family had theirs in the ordinary breakfast room, Leezibeth presiding. It was during this meal that Coquette began for the first time to realise the fact that there existed between her and the people around her some terrible and inexplicable difference which shut her out from them. Leezibeth was cold and distant to her. The boys, all except the Whaup, who manfully took her part, looked curiously at her. And with her peculiar sensitiveness to outward impressions, she began to ask herself if there might not be some cause for this suspicion on their part. Perhaps she was, unknown to herself, more wicked than others. Perhaps her ignorance—as in this matter of music, which she had always regarded as harmless—had blinded her to the fact that there was something more demanded of her than the simple, and innocent, and joyous life she believed herself to have led. These doubts and anxieties

grew in proportion to their vagueness. Was she, after all, a dangerous person to have come among these religious people? Andrew would have been rejoiced to know of these agitating thoughts: she was awakening to a sense of wretchedness and sin.

Scarcely was breakfast over than a message was brought that Mr. Cassilis desired to see his niece privately. Coquette rose up, very pale. Was it now that she was to have explained to her the measure of her own godlessness, that seemed to be a barrier between her and the people among whom she was to live?

She went to the door of the study and paused there, with her heart beating. Already she felt like a leper that stood at the gates, and was afraid to talk to any passer-by for fear of a cruel repulse. She opened the door, with downcast look, and entered. Her agitation prevented her from speaking. And then, having raised her eyes, and seeing before her the tall, grey-haired Minister seated in his chair, she suddenly went forward to him, and flung herself at his feet, bursting into a wild fit of weeping, and burying her face in his knees. In broken speech, interrupted by passionate sobbing and tears, she implored him to deal gently with her if she had done wrong.

"I do not know," she said, "I do not know. I do not mean to do wrong. I will do what you tell me—but I am all alone here—and I cannot live if you are angry with me. I will go away, if you like—perhaps it will be better if I go away, and not vex you any more."

"But you have not vexed me, my lassie—you have done no wrong that I know of," he said, putting his hand on her head. "What is all this? What does it mean?"

She looked up to see whether the expression of his face corresponded with the kindness of his voice. She saw in those worn, grey, lined features nothing but gentleness and affection; and the ordinary sternness of the deep-set eyes was replaced by a profound pity.

"I cannot tell you in English—in French I could," she said. "They speak to me as if I was different from them, and wicked; and I do not know in what. I thought you wished to reproach me. I could not bear that. If I do wrong without knowing, I will do better if you will tell me ;

but I cannot live all by myself, and think that I am wicked, and not know. If it is wrong to play music, I will not play any more music. I will ask Lissiebess to pardon me my illness of this morning, which I did not know at all."

The Minister smiled.

"So you have been playing music this morning, and Leezibeth has stopped you? I hope she was not to blame in her speech, for to her it would seem very heinous to hear profane music on the Sabbath. Indeed, we all of us in Scotland consider that the Sabbath should be devoted to meditation and worship, not to idleness and amusement; and ye will doubtless come to consider it no great hardship to shut your piano one day out o' the seven. But I sent for ye this morning wi' quite another purpose than to scold ye for having fallen through ignorance into a fault, of which, indeed, I knew nothing."

He now began to unfold to her the serious perplexity which had been caused him by the fact of her having been brought up a Roman Catholic. On the one hand, he had a sacred duty to perform to her as being almost her sole surviving relation; but on the other hand, was he justified in supplanting with another faith that faith in which her mother had desired her to remain? The Minister had been seriously troubled about this matter; and wished to have it settled before he permitted her to go to church with the rest of his family. He was a scrupulously conscientious man. They used to say of him in Airlie that if Satan, in arguing with him, were to fall into a trap, Mr. Cassilis would scorn to take advantage of any mere slip of the tongue—a piece of rectitude not invariably met with in religious disputes. When, therefore, the Minister saw placed in his hands a willing convert, he would not accept of the conversion without explaining to her all the bearings of the case, and pointing out to her clearly what she was doing.

Coquette solved the difficulty in a second.

"If mamma were here," she said, "she would go at once to your church. It never mattered to us—the church. The difference—or is it differation is the proper English?—was nothing to us; and papa did not mind. I will go to your church, and you will tell me all what it is right. I will soon know all your religion," she added, more cheerfully, "and I

will sing those dreadful slow tunes which papa used to sing—to make mamma laugh.”

“My brother might have been better employed,” said the Minister, with a frown; but Coquette ran away, light-hearted, to dress herself to go with the others.

The Whaup was a head taller when he issued from the Manse, by the side of his new cousin, to go down to the little church. He was her protector. He snubbed the other boys. To one of them—Wattie the sneak—he had administered a sharp cuff on the side of the head, when the latter, on Coquette being summoned into the study, remarked confidentially, “She’s gaun to get her licks;” and now, when the young lady had come out in all the snowy brightness of her summer costume, Wattie revenged himself by murmuring to his companions—

“Doesna she look like a play-actress?”

So the small procession passed along the rough moorland road until they drew near the little grey church and its graveyard of rude stones. Towards this point converged the scattered twos and threes now visible across the moor and down in the village—old men and women, young men and maidens all in their best Sunday “braws.” The dissonant bell was sounding harshly; and the boys, before going into the gloomy little building, threw a last and wistful glance over the broad moor, where the bronzed and the yellow butterflies were fluttering in the sunlight, and the bees drowsily humming in the heather.

They entered. Every one stared at Coquette, as they had stared at her outside. The boys could not understand the easy self-composure with which she followed the Whaup down between the small wooden benches, and took her place in the Minister’s pew. There was no confusion or embarrassment in her manner on meeting the eyes of a lot of strangers.

“She’s no feared,” said Wattie to his neighbour.

When Coquette had taken her seat, she knelt down and covered her face with her hands. The Whaup touched her arm quickly.

“Ye must not do that,” said he, looking round anxiously to see whether any of the neighbours had witnessed this piece of Romish superstition.

That glance round dashed from his lips the cup of pleasure he had been drinking. Quietly regarding both himself and Coquette, he met the eyes of Lord Earlshope; and the congregation had not seen anything of Coquette's kneeling, for the simple reason that they had turned from her to gaze on the no less startling phenomenon of Lord Earlshope occupying his family pew, in which he had not been seen for years.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

COQUETTE did not observe the presence of Lord Earlshope for some time. She was much engaged in the service, which was quite new to her. First of all, the Minister rose in his pulpit and read out a psalm; and then, under him, the Precentor rose, and begun, all by himself, to lead off the singing, in a strong harsh voice which had but little music in it. The tune was "Drumclog;" and as Coquette listened, she mentally grouped its fine and impressive melody with chords, and thought of the wonderful strength and sweetness that Mendelssohn could have imparted to that bare skeleton of an air. The people groaned rather than sung; there was not even an attempt at part-singing; the men merely followed the air an octave lower, except when they struck into quite a different key, and produced such dissonances as are indescribable. If the use of the piano were not entirely proscribed, she promised to herself that she would show the Whaup next morning the true character of that simple and noble air which was being so cruelly ill-treated.

There followed a long extempore prayer, and another psalm—sung to the plaintive "Coleshill"—and then there came the sermon. She tried hard to understand it, but she could not. It was an earnest and powerful appeal; but it was so clothed in the imagery of the Jewish prophets—so full of the technical phrases of the Scotch preachers—that she could not follow it. Her English had been chiefly gathered from the free and easy conversation of her father, and even that had been modified by the foreign pronunciation

of her mother ; so that such phrases as “the fulfilment of the covenant,” “girding up the loins,” “awakening unto grace,” and so forth, conveyed no meaning to her whatever. In spite of her best endeavours she found herself dreaming of the Loire—of St. Nazaire, of Guérande, of the salt plains that lie between that town and Le Croisic, and of the Breton peasants in their *bragous-bras* and wide hats, making their pilgrimages to the church of Notre Dame de Mûrier.

The sight of Lord Earlshope had made the Whaup both savage and wicked. He proposed to Wattie to play “Neevie, neevie, nick-nack”—an offer which Wattie looked upon as the direct instigation of the devil, and refused accordingly.

When, at last, Coquette caught the eyes of Lord Earlshope fixed upon her, she was surprised to see him so intently regarding her. There was something wistful, too, in his look ; his face bearing an expression of seriousness she did not expect to find in it. During the brief period in which he talked to her he had left upon her the impression of his being merely a light-hearted young man, who had winning ways, and a good deal of self-confidence. But the fact is, she had paid no very great attention to him ; and even now was not disposed to look upon his fixed gaze as anything beyond a mere accident. She turned her eyes aside ; tried once more to follow the sermon ; and again subsided into dreaming of Bourg de Batz, and the square pools of the salt plains, with the ancient walls of Guérande filling up the horizon of her imagination.

When the service was over, and they had got outside, the Whaup bundled them off on the road towards the Manse with but little ceremony, taking care that Coquette should be in front.

“What has changed you ?” she said, in some surprise. “I did think you were good friends with me on coming to the church.”

“Never mind,” he said. abruptly ; and then he added, sharply, “Did you see Lord Earlshope there ?”

“Certainly I have seen him.”

“What business had he there ?”

“People go not to the church for business,” she said, with a laugh.

"He has not been in that pew for years," said the Whaup, gloomily.

"Perhaps he is becoming a good man?" she said, lightly, making a careless effort to catch a butterfly that fluttered before her face.

"He has plenty to alter then," said the Whaup, with frowning brows.

She looked at him curiously, and laughed. Then she turned to the Whaup's brother.

"Wattie, will you run with me to the house?"

She held out her hand.

"No, I'll no," said Wattie. "Ye are a Roman, and can get absolution for a' the ill ye dae."

"I will, an' ye like," said the youngest of the brothers, Dougal, timidly.

"Come along, then!"

She took his hand, and, before Leczibeth or Andrew could interfere, they were fleeing along the rough road towards the Manse, far in front of the others. Dougal, young as he was, was a swift runner; but the foreign lassie beat him, and was evidently helping him. All at once Dougal was seen to stumble and roll forward. Coquette made a desperate effort to save him, but in vain; and while he fell prone upon the ground, she was brought nearly on her knees. The little fellow got up, looking sadly at one of his hands, which was sorely scratched with the gravel. He regarded her, too, dumbly; clenching his lips to keep himself from crying, although the tears would gather in his eyes. In an instant she had overwhelmed him with pitying caresses, and soft French phrases of endearment, while she carefully smoothed his torn hand with her handkerchief.

"You will come with me to my room, and I will heal it for you."

She carried him off before the others had arrived; and washed his hand; and put cold cream on it; and gave him a whole box of French chocolate—a dainty which he had never seen before, but which he speedily appreciated. Then she said,

"Come along, now, and I will sing you something—Alas! no, I must not open my piano any more."

It was the first time Dougal had ever heard anybody say

“alas !”—a word which Coquette had picked up from her English books. He began to distrust all this kindness and all these fascinating ways. What Coquette knew of English was more English than Scotch in pronunciation. Now, everybody in Airlie was aware of the curious fact that all actors, and public singers, and such people, generally, as live by their wits, were English ; and an English accent was therefore in itself suspicious. If this young lady in the white muslin dress, with the yellow ribbons in her black hair, was not actually French she was English, which was only a shade less deplorable. Dougal accepted the brown and sweet little balls of chocolate with some compunction, and hoped he was doing no mortal sin in eating them.

After the “interval,” as it was technically called, they had to go to church again, and here Coquette’s patience nearly gave way. Nor was the situation rendered less grievous by the Whaup informing her severely that in Airlie there was no such thing as idle walking about on the Sabbath—that the whole of the afternoon she would not even be permitted to go into the garden, but would have to sit indoors and read a “good book.” The Whaup was not ill-pleased to have to convey this information : he fancied Lord Earls-hope might be prowling about.

There was a “tea dinner” at four o’clock, consisting exclusively of cold meats, with tea added. Thereafter, the whole family sat down in solemn silence to their books—the list being the Bible, the Shorter and Longer Catechisms, Hutcheson’s Exposition, Dr. Spurstow on the Promise, the Christian’s Charter, Bishop Downham on the Covenant of Grace (these last “printed for *Ralph Smith*, at the *Bible in Cornhill*”), and Josephus. By this copy of Josephus there hangs a tale.

Dougal, remembering that business of the chocolate, came over to Coquette, and whispered—

“If ye are freends wi’ the Whaup, he’ll show ye the third volumn o’ Josephus.”

Indeed, the boys manifested the most lively curiosity when the Whaup appeared bearing the third volume of Josephus in his hand. They seemed to forget the sunlight outside, and the fresh air of the moor, in watching this treasure. The Whaup sat down at the table (the Minister

was at the upper end of the room, in his arm-chair) and the third volume of Josephus was opened.

Coquette perceived that some mystery was abroad. The boys drew more and more near to the Whaup; and were apparently more anxious to see the third volume of Josephus than anything else. She observed also that the Whaup, keeping the board of the volume up, never seemed to turn over any leaves.

She, too, overcome by feminine curiosity, drew near. The Whaup looked at her—suspiciously at first, then he seemed to relent.

“Have ye read Josephus?” he said aloud to her.

“No,” said Coquette.

“It is a most valuable work,” said the Minister from the upper end of the room (the Whaup started), “as giving corroboration to the sacred writings from one who was not himself an advocate of the truth.”

Coquette moved her chair in to the table. The Whaup carefully placed the volume before her. She looked at it, and beheld—two white mice!

The mystery was solved. The Whaup had daringly cut out the body of the volume, leaving the boards and a margin of the leaves all round. In the hole thus formed reposed two white mice, in the feeding and petting of which he spent the whole Sunday afternoon, when he was supposed to be reading diligently. No wonder the boys were anxious to see the third volume of Josephus; and when any one of them had done a particular favour to the Whaup, he was allowed to have half an hour of the valuable book. There were also two or three leaves left in front; so that, when any dangerous person passed, these leaves could be shut down over the cage of the mice.

They were thus engaged when Leezibeth suddenly opened the door, and said—

“Lord Earlshope would speak wi’ ye, sir.”

Astonishment was depicted on every countenance. From time immemorial no visitor had dared to invade the sanctity of Airlie Manse on a Sabbath afternoon.

“Show him into my study, Leezibeth,” said the Minister.

“By no means,” said his lordship, entering, “I would not disturb you, Mr. Cassilis, on any account. I have

merely called in to say a passing word to you, although I know it is not good manners in Airlie to pay visits on Sunday."

"Your lordship is doubtless aware," returned Mr. Cassilis, gravely, "that it is not any consideration of manners that leads us to keep the Sabbath inviolate from customs which on other days are lawful and praiseworthy."

"I know, I know," said the young gentleman, good-naturedly, and taking so little notice of the hint as to appropriate a chair; "but you must blame my English education if I fall short. Indeed, it struck me this morning that I have of late been rather remiss in attending to my duties; and I made a sort of resolve to do better. You would see I was at church to-day."

"You could not have been in a more fitting place," said the Minister.

Mr. Cassilis, despite the fact that he was talking to the patron of the living—Lord Earlshope's father had presented him to the parish of Airlie—was not disposed to be too gracious to this young man, whose manner of conduct, although in no way openly sinful, had been a scandal to the neighbourhood.

"He'll have a heavy reckonin' to settle i' the next worl'," Andrew used to say, "be he lord or no lord. What think ye, sirs, o' a young man that reads licht books and smokes cigaurs frae the rising o' the sun even till the ganging doon o' the same; and roams about on the Lord's day breaking in a wheen pointers?"

The boys looked on this visit of Lord Earlshope as a blessed relief from the monotony of the Sunday afternoon; and while they kept their eyes steadily directed on their books, listened eagerly to what he had to say. This amusement did not last long. His lordship—scarcely taking any notice of Coquette in his talk, though he sometimes looked at her by chance—spoke chiefly of some repairs in the church which he was willing to aid with a subscription; and, having thus pleased the Minister, mentioned that Earlshope itself had been undergoing repairs and re-decoration.

"And I have no near neighbours but yourselves, Mr.

Cassilis, to see our new grandeur. Will you not pay Earlshope a visit? What do you say to coming over, the whole of you, to-morrow, and seeing what I have done? I dare say Mrs. Graham will be able to get some lunch for you; and I should like your niece—whom I had the pleasure of seeing on her way here—to give me her opinion about an organ that has been sent me from abroad. What do you say? I am sure the boys will enjoy a holiday in the grounds, and be able to find amusement for themselves.”

If the Whaup dared to have spoken, he would have refused in indignant terms. The other boys were delighted with the prospect—although they were still supposed to be reading. Coquette merely looked at Mr. Cassilis, apparently without much interest, awaiting his answer.

Mr. Cassilis replied, in grave and dignified terms of courtesy, that he would be proud to avail himself of his lordship's invitation; and added that he hoped this re-establishment of the relations which had existed between Earlshope and the Manse in the time of his lordship's father meant that he, the present Lord Earlshope, intended to come oftener to church than had been his wont of late. The hint was conveyed in very plain language. The young nobleman, however, took it in good part, and speedily bade them good evening. He bowed to Coquette as he passed her; and she acknowledged this little manifestation of respect, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

CHAPTER V.

COQUETTE'S MUSIC.

WHAT was this great rushing and whistling noise that filled the girl's ears as the light of the morning—entering by a small window which had no sort of blind or shutter—fell on her face and opened her confused eyes to its glare? She had been dreaming of Earlshope. Dreams are but *réchauffés* of past experiences; and this ghostly Earlshope that she had visited in her sleep was a French Earlshope. The broad blue Loire ran down a valley in front of it. There were hills for a background which had long terraces of vines

on them. From the windows she could see the steamers—mere dots with a long serpent trail of smoke behind them—creep into the haven of St. Nazaire ; and far over the sea lay the calm summer stillness of a southern sky.

She awoke to find herself in Scotland. The Manse shook in the wind. There was a roaring of rain on the slates and on the window panes ; and a hissing outside told of the deluge that was pouring a red stream down the moorland road. Fierce gusts from the south-west flew about the house, and howled in the chimney ; great grey masses of cloud, riven by the hurricane, came up from the sea and swept across the moor. The room was cold and damp. When she had partly dressed, she went to the window. Along the horizon there was a thin black line, dull as lead, which was all that was visible of the sea. The mountains of Arran had entirely vanished, and in their place was a wall of grey vapour. Flying before the blast came those huge volumes of smoke-like cloud ; and every now and again their lower edges would be torn down by the wind and hurled upon the moor in heavy, slanting torrents of rain ; while there was a sound of rushing water everywhere ; and the trees and shrubs of the garden bent and shivered in the gleaming wet.

“No Earlshope for ye to-day,” said the Whaup, with ill-disguised glee, when she went down-stairs to breakfast.

“I am not sorry. What a dreadful chill country !” said Coquette, who was trembling with cold.

“Would you like a fire ?” said the Whaup, eagerly.

“A fire, indeed !” cried Leezibeth, as she entered with the tray. “A fire in the middle o’ summer ! We have na been brought up to sic luxuries in this pairt o’ the country.”

“I am not very cold,” said Coquette, sitting down in a corner, and trying to keep herself from shivering.

The Whaup walked out of the room. He was too angry to speak. He looked once at Leezibeth on going out, and there was a blaze of wrath in his eyes.

The Minister came in to breakfast, and they all sat down—all but the Whaup.

“Where is Thomas ?” said Mr. Cassilis.

The reply was a shrill scream from Leezibeth, who was apparently at the door. At the same moment a wild

crackling and sputtering of fire was heard overhead ; and as everybody rushed to the passage, it was found that dense volumes of smoke were rolling down, blown by the currents above. Leezibeth had flown up-stairs on first perceiving this smell of burning. There, in Coquette's parlour, she caught sight of the Whaup working like a demon within the pungent clouds that filled the room, blown outwards by the fierce wind coming down the chimney. With another cry of alarm Leezibeth darted into the nearest bedroom, and brought out a ewer of water, which she discharged at the blazing mass of newspapers and lumps of wood that the Whaup had crammed into the small grate.

"Would ye set fire to the house? Would ye set fire to the house?" she cried—and, indeed, it looked as if the house were on fire.

"Yes, I would," shouted the demon in the smoke, "rather than kill anybody wi' cold!"

"Oh, it's that lassie—it's that lassie," cried Leezibeth, "that'll be the ruin o' us a'!"

When assistance came, and the fire was finally subdued, both the Whaup and Leezibeth were spectacles to have awakened the ridicule of gods and men. The effect of the deluge of water had been to send up a cloud of dust and ashes with the smoke ; and their respective faces were tattooed so that even Mr. Cassilis—for the first time these many years—burst into a fit of laughter. Even Wattie laughed ; seeing which, the Whaup charged at him, caught him by the waist, and carried him bodily down-stairs and out through the rain to the yard, where he made him work the iron handle of the pump. When the Whaup made his appearance at the breakfast table he was clean ; but both himself and his brother were rather damp.

Mr. Cassilis severely reprimanded his eldest son ; but he ordered Leezibeth to light a fire in Miss Cassilis' room nevertheless. The wind had somewhat abated now, and the clouds had gathered for a steady downpour. Leezibeth went to her appointed task with bitterness of heart, but she comforted herself with texts. As she stuffed the unconsumed remnants of the Whaup's bonfire into the grate, she uttered a denunciation of the luxury and idleness which were appearing for the first time in a godly house.

"But we," she muttered to herself, "who are the poor o' this world, rich in faith, and heirs o' the kingdom, maun bide and suffer. We maun e'en be the servants o' such as this woman that has come amongst us—such as lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall ; that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David ; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves wi' the chief ointments : but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph."

Yet even these consolations did not seem quite to allay the irritation of her mind ; for a big tom cat that belonged to the house having approached her elbow too confidently, suddenly received a "skelp" that sent him flying across the room and down the stairs as if the spirits of ten thousand legions of dogs were pursuing him.

Airlie Manse was destined that day to be given up to what Leezibeth would have called the noise of viols and godless rejoicings. All thought of getting to Earlshope was abandoned ; and shortly after breakfast Coquette invited Mr. Cassilis and the boys to her sitting-room, promising to play something for them. Custom made the Minister hesitate for a moment. Was not dance music very near dancing, which he regarded as a profane and dangerous amusement ?

"I wish to play for you—what you call it ?—the tune of the church yesterday, as it should be sung. Will you hear it from me ?"

No objection of course could be taken to sacred music. The Minister led the way to the room ; and the boys sat down silently, looking round with curiosity and awe upon the strange bits of foreign adornment and luxury which Coquette had already placed about her chamber. The fire was burning brightly, the rain battering on the panes outside. Coquette sat down to the piano.

The Minister did not know at first that he was listening to the old and familiar air of "Drumclog." It seemed to him the cry of a great supplication—sad, yearning, and distant, as if it came from a far hill-side half hidden in mist. It sounded like the softened and various voices of a great multitude made harmonious and pathetic by distance.

But when she smote firmer chords, and, with a resonant and powerful bass, let the clear treble ring out triumphantly, he recognised "Drumclog." It was a song of victory now—the war cry of a host moved by intense religious enthusiasm—there was a joyous thanksgiving in it, and the clear voices of women and children. It seemed to him to represent a tumult of rejoicing—set in measured and modulated music—that rose like one sweet, strong voice. Then again the chords were softened, and the air changed to a wail. He could almost see the far moor, and the dead lying on it, with women wringing their hands, and yet thanking God for the victory.

"It is wonderful, wonderful," he said, when Coquette had ceased playing, "the power o' a dumb instrument to speak such strange things."

He was surprised to find that this carnal invention of music had awakened such profound emotion within him. He covertly looked to see if the girl herself were affected as she had affected him; but Coquette turned round and said, lightly, "It is a good air, but your church people they do not sing it. They groan, groan, groan all the same air—no singing in parts, no music."

"But you would make any tune, however bad, sound well," said the Whaup, warmly. "To every one note you give four or five other notes, all in harmony. No wonder it sounds well. It is no test. Play us some of your foreign music, that we may compare it."

The boys looked at the Whaup with astonishment: he was becoming an orator.

So she played them the *Cujus animam*, and for the first time in its history the Manse of Airlie was flooded with that sonorous music that has entranced the hearts of multitudes. She played them the mystic melodies of the *Hochzeitmarsch*, and they thought that these also were the expression of a sublime devotional exaltation. Indeed, the boys regarded those pieces with something of awe and fear. There was an unholy smack of organ playing and Romanism about Coquette's performances. Had she not transformed the decent and sober tune of "Drumclog" into a mass, or chant, or some such vague portion of Catholic ordinances? Wattie was in possession of an ingenious little book on

“Various Forms of Idolatry;” and—the first plate representing the burning at the stake of a “Popish witch”—he had pointed out to his brothers that the black and profuse hair of the young woman in the flames very much resembled the hair of Coquette. It was but a suggestion; yet Rabbie, another of the brothers, expressed the belief that there were witches in these days also, that they were emissaries of the “deevil,” and that it behoved every one who wished to save his soul to guard against such fiends in disguise, and, above all, never to repeat any charm after them towards twelve of the night.

Coquette rose from the piano.

“Who is going to play for me now?” she said, looking at the boys.

A loud guffaw ran down the line of them—the notion of a boy being able to play on the piano was irresistibly ludicrous.

“Have you not learned at the school?” she asked. “You must know some pieces to play.”

“Frenchmen *may* learn to play the piano,” said the Whaup, with an air of calm superiority, “but men in this country have something else to do.”

“What is it you do?” said Coquette, simply, having quite misunderstood the remark. “You play not the piano: is it the violin—the—the flute—one learns here at the school?”

“We dinna learn music at the schule, ye gowk,” said one of the boys.

“No, nor manners either,” said the Whaup, firing up at the last word.

At this juncture the Minister gravely thanked Coquette for the pleasure her music had given him, and left the room. No sooner had he gone than the Whaup ordered his brothers to follow. They seemed inclined to show a spirit of insubordination.

“Out every one o’ ye!” he cried, “or I’ll leather ye in a lump!”

This somewhat dictatorial proceeding left him master of the field. So he turned to Coquette, and said—

“Ye wanted to hear some music. There is but one musician in Airlie forbye the Precentor. I mean Neil the

Pensioner. He's a famous player on the fiddle—an out-and-out player, ye may take my word for't. Will I go and bring him to ye?"

"Perhaps he will not come."

"Oh, I'll bring him," said the Whaup, confidently.

"But it rains much," said Coquette, looking out on the disconsolate grey landscape, the dripping trees, and the lowering sky.

The Whaup laughed aloud, as his long legs carried him down the soft red road over the moor towards the village. He was no timid French creature, brought up under fair skies, that he should dread a temporary wetting. When he arrived at Neil Lamont's cottage, the rain was running down his face, and he only blew it from his mouth and flung it from his fingers as he burst into the astonished Pensioner's presence, and bade him bundle up his fiddle and come along.

The Pensioner, as he was called, was a tall, spare old Highlandman, somewhat bent now, with scanty grey hair, and dazed, mild grey eyes, who had been at Waterloo. He represented at once the martial and musical aspects of Airlie. His narrative of the events of Waterloo had gradually, during many years, become more and more full of personal detail, until the old man at last firmly believed that he himself, in his own proper person, had witnessed the whole of the battle, and been one of the chief heroes of the hour. Napoleon, whom he had never seen, he described minutely; and the inhabitants of Airlie had learned to picture the rage and mortification visible on the face of the great commander when he saw Neil rushing on to victory over the dead bodies of six French grenadiers, whom the hardy Highlander had overcome. Waterloo had grown to be a great panorama for him; and he would unroll it at any moment, and name you every object and person in the picture.

He was the village musician, too, and was in much request at balls, marriages, and other celebrations. The old man was singularly sensitive to music, and the wicked boys of the village used to practise on his weakness. When they saw the Pensioner out walking, they would begin to whistle some military march—"The Campbells are coming," "The Girl I left behind me," or "What's a' the steer, kimmer"—and you could see the Pensioner draw himself up, and go on with

a military swagger, with his head erect. As for his own musical efforts, was there anybody in the west of Scotland who could play "The East Neuk o' Fife" with such tremendous "spunk?"

When the Pensioner was told that he had to play to a young French lady, he was a proud man.

"Ye will na sink," he observed to the Whaup in his curious jumble of Lowland and Highland pronunciation, "sat I will hurt sa leddy's feelins. No. Our prave regiments sent sa French fleein' at Waterloo; but I will speak jist nae word apoot it. I sweer till't—she will not even pe sinkin I wass at Waterloo."

Coquette received him graciously; the old Highlander was respectful, and yet dignified, in return. He gently declined to show her his medal—fearful that the word "Waterloo" would pain her. He would not say a word about his soldiering—was it good manners to insult a beaten foe?

But he would play for her. He took his fiddle from its case, and sat down, and played her all manner of reels and strathspeys—but no military music.

"Wha will ken," he whispered significantly to the Whaup, "put sat she will have heard o' our victorious tunes? Na, na. Neil Lamont kens how to pehave himsel' to a leddy."

And, in return, Coquette sat down to the piano. There was one Scotch air—"Wha'll be King but Charlie"—which her father was particularly fond of. When she struck into that bold and stirring piece of music, with all the agencies of harmonious chords, the old Highlander sat at first apparently stupefied. He had never known the majesty and the power that could be lent to the tune which boys played on penny whistles. But as he became familiar with the rich and splendid sounds, he became more and more excited. He beat time with his foot; he slapped his thigh with his hand; he kept his head erect, and looked defiance. Suddenly he seemed to forget the presence of the Whaup, who was seated in a corner; he started to his feet, and began pacing up and down the room, waving the bow of his violin as if it were a sword. And all at once Coquette heard behind her the shrill and quavering notes of an old man's voice—

"Come ower sa heather! come a' tagether!
Come Ronald, an' Tonald, an' a' tagether!"

and, when she turned round, the old Highlandman, as one possessed, was marching up and down the chamber, with his head high in the air, and tears running down his withered grey cheeks.

"*Aw, Dyeea!*" he cried, as he sank shamefacedly into a chair. "I have never heard sa like o' sat not since sa day I will pe porn!"

CHAPTER VI.

EARLSHOPE.

How fair, and fresh, and green looked the grounds of Earlshope on the next day, when Mr. Cassilis and Coquette drew near. The warm sun had come out again, and the air was sweet with the scent of the wet trees. Masses of white cloud still came up from the south, sweeping over the dark, clear blue of the sky; and the peaks of Arran, set far amid the sea, were pale and faint in a haze of silver light.

Coquette was merry-hearted. The sunshine seemed to please her as it pleased the butterflies and the bees that were again abroad. As she went down the moorland path, she laughed and chatted with the Minister, and was constantly, out of pure lightness of spirit, breaking into exclamations in her native tongue—on which she would suddenly recall herself with a pout of impatience and resume her odd and quaint English talk.

The Whaup had been ill-tempered on setting forth; but the sunlight and the bright life around him thawed his sulkiness, and he became merely mischievous. His brothers perceived his mood, and kept out of his way. He was in the humour for rough practical jokes; and no one of them wished to be tripped up and sent into the red-coloured "burn" that still ran down between the moor and the road to the little stream in the hollow.

When they had passed the keeper's lodge, and gone under a winding avenue of trees, they came in sight of the big stone building and the bright green lawn in front of it. They also saw their host seated beside a stone lion, smoking a cigar, and watching the operations of a lad who, mounted

on the pedestal of a statue of Venus, was busily engaged in giving that modest but scantily clad young woman a coating of white paint.

"Did you ever see anything so curious?" he said, when he had bade them welcome. "Look at the rude indifference with which he comes over her nose, and gives her a slap on the cheek, and tickles her neck with his brush! I have been wondering what she would do if she were to come alive—whether she would scream and run away, or rise up in indignant silence, or give him a sound box on the ears."

"If she were to come alive," said Coquette, "he would be made blind with fear, and she would fly up into the heavens."

"*Et procul in tenuem ex oculis evanuit auram*," said the Minister, graciously, with a smile. He had not aired so much Latin for years.

They had a walk round the grounds, skirting the not very extensive park, before they turned into the garden. Here everything was heavy with perfume in the sweet, warm air. They went into the hothouses and vineries; and Lord Earlshope found a bunch of muscatel grapes ripe enough to be cut for Coquette. No sooner had she placed one between her lips than she cried out—

"Oh, how like to the vine! I have not tasted——"

She looked at the Minister, and hastily stopped her speech.

"You have not tasted muscatel grapes in this country," said Lord Earlshope, coming to her relief; and he looked at her with a peculiar smile, as much as to say "I know you meant wine."

The boys preferring to remain in the garden (the Whaup walked off by himself into the park, under pretence of seeking a peculiar species of *Potentilla*), Lord Earlshope led his two principal guests back to the house, and proceeded to show them its curiosities in the way of pictures, old armour, old furniture, and the like. Coquette got so familiarised to his voice and look that she forgot he was but a distant acquaintance. She did not know that she stared at him while he was talking, or that she spoke to him with a pleasant carelessness which was oddly out of keeping with

the Minister's grave and formal courtesy. She was not even aware that she was taking note of his appearance; and that, after they had left, she would be able to recall every lineament in his face as well as every tone of his voice.

Lord Earlishope was a fair-haired, gentlemanly-looking young man of some twenty-six or twenty-eight years of age. He was rather over the middle height, slimly built, and inclined to lounge carelessly. The expression of his eyes, which were large, grey, and clear, varied singularly—at one time being full of a critical and somewhat cold scrutiny, and at other times pensive and distant. He said he had no politics and no prejudices—unless a very definite belief in “blood” could be considered a prejudice.

“It is no superstition with me,” he said, with apparent carelessness, to the Minister, as the latter was examining a strange old family tree hung up in the library. “I merely think it imprudent for a man of good family to marry out of his own class. I have seen the experiment made by some of my own acquaintances; and, as a rule, the result has been disastrous. . . . Disastrous, yes,” he went on slowly, with a curious look coming over his face. “Yes, indeed, a disaster——”

But at this moment Coquette came back from the bookshelves, with a large thin quarto in her hands.

“Look what I have found,” she said. “A volume of old chants.”

“It is treasure-trove,” said Lord Earlishope, with his face lightening at her approach. “I had no idea there was such a book in the place. Shall we go and try some of them? You know you promised to give me your opinion of the organ I have had fitted up.”

“I did not promise it, but I will do it,” said Coquette.

He led the way down-stairs to the drawing-room, which they had not yet visited. The tall chamber-organ, a handsome and richly decorated instrument, stood in a recess, and therefore did not seem so cumbrous as it might otherwise have done.

“The defect of the organ,” said Lord Earlishope, as he placed the music for her, “is that the operation of blowing the bellows is performed in sight of the public. You see,

I must fix in this handle, and work it while you are playing."

"You must get a screen," she said, "and put a servant there."

"While you are playing," he said, "I could not let anybody else assist you even in so rude a fashion."

Coquette laughed and sat down. Presently, the solemn tones of the organ were pealing out a rich and beautiful chant—full of the quaint and impressive harmonies which the monks of old pondered over and elaborated. If Mr. Cassilis was troubled by a suspicion that this noble music was of distinctly Roman Catholic or idolatrous origin, that doubt became a certainty when, at the end of the chant, there came a long and wailing "Amen!" rolled out by the organ's deep voice.

"You play excellently—you must be familiar with organ playing," said Lord Earlslope. "It is not every one who knows the piano who can perform on an organ."

"At home the old *curé* used to let me play in the church," she said—with her eyes grown suddenly distant and sad. She had remembered that her home no longer lay away down there in the south, where life seemed so pleasant.

"Come," said Lord Earlslope, "I hear Sandy about to ring the bell for luncheon. Shall we go into the room at once, or wait for the boys?"

"They will have their luncheon off your fruit trees, I am afraid," said Mr. Cassilis.

Nevertheless, the boys were sent for, and arrived, looking rather afraid. The Whaup was not with them; no one knew whither he had gone.

Lord Earlslope's household was far from being an extensive one; and Mr. Cassilis' boys found themselves waited on by two maid-servants who were well known to them as having been made the subject of many tricks; while Sandy, his lordship's valet, butler, courier, and general factotum—a tall and redheaded Scotchman, who, by reason of his foreign travels, had acquired a profound contempt for everything in his own country—approached Miss Cassilis with a lofty air, and, standing behind her at some little distance from the table, extended a bottle of Chablis so as to reach her glass.

"Miss Cassilis," said Lord Earlishope, "what wine will remind you most of the Loire?"

It had been her own thought, and she looked up with a quick and grateful smile.

"My father left me a fair assortment of Bordeaux wines——" he said.

"But no *vin ordinaire*?" she interposed, with another bright glance.

"I must go myself to get you that," he answered, laughing, "Sandy does not know how to manufacture it."

Before she could protest he had left the room, and in a few minutes he had returned with a bottle in his hand, and with the air of a conjuror on his face. He himself filled her glass, and Coquette drank a little of it.

"Ah!" she cried, clasping her hands, "I think I can hear old Nannette talking outside, and the river running underneath us; it is like being at home—as if I were at home again!"

She fondled the glass as if it were a magical talisman that had transported her over the sea, and would have to bring her back.

"I must taste some of that wizard wine," said the Minister, with a humorous smile—and the boys stared with wonder to hear their father talking about drinking wine.

"Pray don't, Mr. Cassilis," said their host, with a laugh. "It is merely some new and rough claret to which I added a little water—the nearest approximation to *vin ordinaire* I could think of. Since your niece is so pleased with the Earlishope vintage, I think I must ask you to let me send her a supply to the Manse. It is quite impossible you can get it elsewhere, as I keep the recipe in my own hands."

"And this is French bread!" said Coquette, startled out of her good manners by perceiving before her a long, narrow, brown loaf.

"Have I been so fortunate as to create another surprise?" said Lord Earlishope. "I telegraphed for that bread to Glasgow, if I must tell you all my housekeeping secrets."

It soon became clear that the indolent young man, having nothing better to do, had laid his plans to get a thoroughly French repast prepared for Coquette. Every little dish that

was offered her—the red mullet, the bit of fowl, the dry boiled beef and thick sauce, the plate of salad—was another wonder and another reminiscence of the south. Why, it was only a few days since she had arrived in Scotland, and yet it seemed ages since she had sat down to such another pretty French breakfast as this practically was. She sipped her *vin ordinaire*, and toyed with the various dishes that were offered her—accepting all, and taking a little bit of each for the very pleasure of “thinking back”—with such evident delight that even Mr. Cassilis smiled benignantly. The boys at the Manse—like other boys in Scotland—had been taught that it was extremely ignominious to experience or exhibit any enjoyment in the vulgar delights of eating and drinking ; but surely in the pleased surprise with which Coquette regarded the French table around her, there was little of the sensuous satisfaction of the gourmand.

She was altogether delighted with this visit to Earlshope. As they went back to the Manse, she was in the most cheerful of moods, and fairly fascinated the grave Minister with her quaint, broken talk. She never ceased to speak of the place—of its grounds, its gardens, its books, and what not—even to the brightness of the atmosphere around it ; until Mr. Cassilis asked her if she thought the sky was blue only over Earlshope.

“But I hope he will not send the wine—it was a—what you call it?—joke, was it not ?” she said.

“A joke, of course,” said Mr. Cassilis. “We are very proud in this country, and do not take presents from rich people.”

“But I am not of your country,” she said, with a laugh. “If he sends his stupid *vin ordinaire*, he sends it to me ; and I will not drink it—you shall drink it all. Did he say he is coming over to see you soon ?”

“Well, no,” replied the Minister ; “but since the ice is broken, nothing is more likely.”

The phrase about the ice puzzled Coquette much : when it had been explained to her, they had already reached the Manse. But where was the Whaup ? Nobody had seen him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CRUCIFIX.

"I AM going to sea," said the Whaup, suddenly presenting himself before Coquette. She looked up with her soft dark eyes, and said—

"Why you go to sea?"

"Because," said the Whaup—evidently casting about for an excuse—"because the men of this country should be a seafaring race, as their forefathers were. We cannot all be living in big towns, and becoming clerks. I am for a hardier life. I am sick of staying at home. I cannot bear this idling any more. I have been down to the coast; and when I smell the salt air, and see the waves come tumbling in, I hate to turn my face to the land again."

There was a sort of shamefaced enthusiasm in the lad's manner; and Coquette, as she again regarded him, perceived that, although he believed all he had said, that was not the cause of his hasty determination. Yet the boy looked every inch a sailor—the sun-brown hair thrown back from his handsome face, and the clear light shining in his blue eyes.

"There is something else," said the girl. "Why you say nothing of all this before? Why do you wish to become a sailor all at once?"

"And, if I must tell you," said he, with a sudden fierceness, "I will. I don't choose to stay here to see what I know will happen. You are surprised? Perhaps. But you are a mere child. You have been brought up in a French convent, or some such place. You think everybody in the world is like yourself, and you make friends with anybody. You think they are all as good and as kind as yourself; and you are so light-hearted, you never stop to think or to suspect. Enough; you may go on your way, in spite of warning; but I will not remain here to see my family disgraced by your becoming the friend and companion of a man like Lord Earlshope."

He spoke warmly and indignantly; and the girl rather

cowed before him, until he uttered the fatal word "disgrace."

"Disgrace!" she repeated, and a quick light sprang to her eyes. "I have disgraced no one, not any time in my life! I will choose my own friends, and I will not be suspicious. You are worse than the woman here: she wants me to believe myself bad and wicked. Perhaps I am—I do not know—but I will not begin to suspect my friends of being bad. If he is so bad, why does your father go to his house?"

"My father is as simple as you are," said the Whaup, contemptuously.

"Then it is only that you are suspicious? I did not think it of you."

She looked hurt and vexed; and a great compunction filled the heart of the Whaup.

"Look here," he said, firmly (and in much better English than was customary with him), "you are my cousin, and it is my business to warn you when you are likely to get into trouble. But don't imagine I am going to persecute you. No. You may do as you please. Perhaps you are quite right. Perhaps it is only that I am suspicious. But, as you are my cousin, I don't wish to stand by and see what is likely to happen; and so I am going away. The sea will suit me better than a college life, or a doctor's shop, or a pulpit."

Coquette rose from her seat, and began to walk up and down the room, in deep distress.

"I must go," she said; "it is I who must go. I bring wretchedness when I come here—my friends are made miserable—it is my fault. I should not have come. In France I was very happy; they used to call me the peacemaker at school; and all the people there were cheerful and kind. Here I am wicked—I do not know how—and the cause of contention and pain. Ah, why you go away because of me!" she suddenly exclaimed, as she took his hand, while tears started to her eyes. "It does not matter to me if I go—I am nobody; I have no home to break up. I can go away, and nobody the worse."

"Perhaps it is the best thing you can do," he said, frankly. "But if you go, I will go with you—to take care of you."

Coquette laughed.

"You are incomprehensible," she said. "Why not take care of me here?"

"Will you give me that duty?" he asked, calmly.

"Yes," she said, with a bright smile, "you shall take care of me as much—as much as you can."

"Mind, it is no joke," said he. "If I resolve to take care of you, I will do it; and anybody interfering——"

He did not finish the sentence.

"You will fight for me?" she said, putting her hand on his arm, and leading him over to the window. "Do you see those clouds away over the sea—how they come on, and on, and go away? These are the moods of a man—his promises—his intentions. But overhead do you see the blue sky?—that is the patience of a woman. Sometimes the clouds are dark—sometimes white—but the sky is always the same: is it not?"

"Hm!" said the Whaup, with a touch of scorn, "that is the romantic stuff they teach you at your French school, is it? It is very pretty, but it isn't true. A man has more patience and more steadfastness than a woman. What you meant was, I suppose, that whatever I might be to you, you would always be the same to me. Perhaps so! We shall see in a few years. But you will never find any difference in me—after any number of years—if you want somebody to take your part. You may remember what I say now afterwards."

"I think I could always trust you," she said, looking rather wistfully at him with those dark eyes that he had almost ceased to regard as foreign and strange. "You have been very good to me since I came here."

"And I have found out something new for you," he said, eagerly—so glad was he to fix and establish those amicable relations. "I hear you were pleased because Lord Earlishope had French things for you to eat and drink?"

"Yes—I was pleased," she said, timidly, and looking down.

"But you don't know that there is a town close by here as like St. Nazaire as it can be: would ye not like to see that?"

"It is impossible!" she said.

"Come and see," he replied.

Coquette very speedily discovered that the Whaup, refusing to accept of Lord Earlshope's invitation, had gone off by himself on a visit to Saltcoats ; that he had fallen in with some sailors there ; that he had begun talking with them of France and of the French seaports ; and that one of the men had delighted him by saying that on one side the very town he was in resembled the old place at the mouth of the Loire. Of course Miss Coquette was in great anxiety to know where this favoured town was situated ; and would at once have started off in quest of it.

"Let us go up to your parlour, and I will show it to you," said the Whaup.

So they went up-stairs, and went to the window. It was getting towards the afternoon ; and a warm light from the south-west lay over the fair yellow country, with its dark lines of hedge and copse, its ruddy streaks of sand, and the distant glimmer of a river. Seaward there was a lowering which presaged a storm ; and the black line of the Saltcoats houses fronted a plain of water which had a peculiar light shining along its surface.

"That is the town," said the Whaup, pointing with a calm air of pride to Saltcoats.

"I see nothing but a line of slates, and a church that seems to stand out in the sea," said Coquette, with some disappointment.

"But you must go down to it to find the old stone wall, and the houses built over it, and the pier and harbour——"

"Ah, is it like that ?" cried his companion, clasping her hands. "Is it like St. Nazaire ? Are there boats ?—and an old church ?—and narrow streets ? Oh, that we go there now !"

"Would you rather see that than drink Lord Earlshope's *vin ordinaire* ?" said the Whaup, with a cold severity.

"Pah !" she cried, petulantly. "You do give me no peace with your Lord Earlshope ! I wish you would fight him, not frighten me with such nonsense. I will believe you are jealous—you stupid boy ! But if you will take me to St. Nazaire—to this place—I will forgive you everything, and I will—what can I do for you !—I will kiss you—I will sew a handkerchief for you—anything."

The Whaup blushed very red, but frowned all the same.

"I will take you to Saltcoats," said he; "but we in this country don't like young ladies to be so free with their favours."

Coquette looked rather taken down, and only ventured to say, by way of submissive apology—

"You are my cousin, you know."

They were about to slip out of the house unperceived, when Leezibeth confronted them.

"Beg your pardon, Miss, but I would like to hae a word wi' ye," she said, in a determined tone, as she blocked up their way.

The Whaup began to look fierce.

"It is seventeen years come Michaelmas," said Leezibeth, in set and measured tones, "since I cam' to this house, and a pious and God-fearing house it has been, as naebody will gainsay. We who are but servants have done our pairt, I hope, to preserve its character; though in His sight there are nae servants and nae masters, for he poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, and yet setteth the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock. I wouldna distinguish between master and servant in the house; but when the master is blind to the things of his household, then it would ill become an honest servant, not afraid to give her testimony——"

"Leezibeth," said the Whaup, "your talk is like a crop o' grass after three months' rain. It's good for neither man nor beast, being but a *blash o' water*."

"As for ye, sir," retorted Leczibeth, angrily, "it was an ill day for ye that ye turned aside to dangle after an idle woman——"

"As sure as daith, Leezibeth," said the Whaup, in his strongest vernacular, "I'll gar ye gang skelpin' through the air like a splinter if ye dinna keep a civil tongue in your head!"

"But what is it all about?" said Coquette, in deep dismay. "What have I done? Have I done any more wrong? I know not—you must tell me——"

"And is it not true, Miss," said Leezibeth, fixing her keen grey eye on the culprit, "that ye daur to keep a crucifix—the symbol of the woman that sits on seven hills—right aboon your head in your bed; and have introduced

this polluting thing into an honest man's house, to work wickedness wi', and set a snare before our feet ? ”

“ I do not know what you mean by seven hills, or a woman,” said Coquette, humbly. “ I thought the cross was a symbol of all religion. If it annoys you, I will take it down, yes—but my mother gave it to me—I cannot put it away altogether. I will hide it, if it annoys you ; but I cannot—surely you will not ask me to part with it altogether——”

“ You shall not part with it,” said the Whaup, drawing himself up to his full height. “ Let me see the man or woman who will touch that crucifix, though it had on it the woman o' Babylon herself ! ”

Leezibeth looked dazed for a moment. It was almost impossible that such words should have been uttered by the eldest son of the Minister ; and for a moment she was inclined to disbelieve the testimony of her ears. Yet there before her stood the lad, tall, proud, handsome, with his eyes burning and his teeth set. And there beside him stood the witch-woman who had wrought this perversion in him—who had come to work destruction in this quiet fold.

“ I maun gang to the Minister,” said Leezibeth, in despair. “ Andrew and I maun settle this maitter, or else set out, in our auld age, for a new resting-place.”

“ And the sooner the Manse is rid of two cantankerous old idiots the better ! ” said the Whaup.

Leezibeth bestowed upon him a glance more of wonder and fear than of anger, and then went her way.

“ Come ! ” said the Whaup to his companion. “ We maun run for it, or we shall see no St. Nazaire this night.”

Then Coquette, feeling very guilty, found herself stealing away from the Manse, led by the Minister's dare-devil son.

CHAPTER VIII.

SALTCOATS.

THE two fugitives fled from the Manse, and crossed over the moor, and went down to the road leading to Saltcoats, in very diverse moods. The Whaup made light of the

affair of the crucifix, and laughed at it as a good joke. Coquette was more thoughtful, and a trifle angry.

"It is too much," she said. "I am not in the habit to make enemies, and I cannot live like this—to be looked at as something very bad. If I do not know the feelings of your country about music, about Sunday, about religion—and it seems even a crime that I shall be cheerful at times—why not tell me instead of to scold? I will do what they want, but I will not be treated like a child. It is too much—this Leesiebess, and her harsh voice, and her scolding. It is too much—it is not bearable—it is a beastly shame!"

"A what?" said the Whaup.

"A beastly shame," she repeated, looking at him rather timidly.

The Whaup burst into a roar of laughter.

"Is it not right?" she said. "Papa did use to say that when he was indignant."

"Oh, it is intelligible enough," said the Whaup, "quite intelligible; but young ladies in this country do not say such things."

"I will remember," said Coquette, obediently.

The Whaup now proceeded to point out to his companion that, after all, there was a good deal to be said on the side of Leezibeth and her husband Andrew. Coquette, he said, had given them some cause to complain. The people of the Manse—whom Coquette took to represent the people of the country—were as kind-hearted as people anywhere else; but they had their customs, their beliefs, their prejudices, to which they clung tenaciously, just like people elsewhere; and, especially, in this matter of the crucifix, she had wounded their feelings by introducing into a Protestant Manse the emblem of a religion which they regarded with horror.

"But why is it that you regard any religion with horror?" said Coquette. "If it is religion, I do think it cannot be much wicked! If you do bring some Protestant emblem into my Catholic church I shall not grumble—I would say, we all believe in the one God—you may have a share of my bench—you may pray just beside me—and we all look to the one Father who is kind to us."

The Whaup shook his head.

“That is a dangerous notion ; but I cannot argue with you about it. Everything you say, everything you do, is somehow so natural, and fitting, and easy, that it seems it must be right. It is all a part of yourself, and all so perfect that nobody would have it altered, even if you were wrong.”

“You do say that ?” said Coquette, with a blush of pleasure.

“That sort of vague religious sentiment you talk of would be contemptible in anybody else, you know,” said the Whaup, frankly—“it would show either weakness of reasoning or indifference ; but in you it is something that makes people like you. Why, I have watched you again and again in the parlour at the Manse ; and whether you let your hand rest on the table, or whether you look out of the window, or whether you come near the fire, you are always easy and graceful. It is a gift you have of making yourself, without knowing it, a picture. When you came out just now, I thought that grey woolly shawl round your shoulders was pretty ; and since you have put it round your head, it is quite charming. You can’t help it. And so you can’t help that light and cheerful way of looking at religion, and of being happy and contented, and of making yourself a pleasure to the people round about you.”

Coquette began to laugh ; and the Whaup came to an uncomfortable stop in the midst of his rapid enthusiasm.

“When you talk like that,” she said, “I think I am again in France, I am so gay-hearted. You approve of me, then ?” she added, timorously.

Approve of her ! Was it possible that she could care for his approval ? And in what language could he express his opinion of her save in the only poetry familiar to Airlie Manse ?—“The King’s daughter is all glorious within : her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework : the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought : they shall enter into the King’s palace.” Only, this King’s daughter was without companions—she was all alone—and the Whaup wondered how this pure and strange jewel came to be dropped in the centre of a Scotch moor.

The wind was blowing hard from the south-west—the region of rain. Arran was invisible ; and in place of the misty peaks there was a great wall of leaden-grey sky, from the base of which came lines and lines of white waves, roaring in to the shore. Coquette drew her thick plaid more closely around her, and pressed on ; for St. Nazaire now lay underneath them—a dark line of houses between the sea and the land.

“What is that woman,” said Coquette, looking along the road, “who stands with the flowers in her hand, and her hair flying ? Is she mad ? Is she Ophelia come to Scotland ?”

Mad enough the girl looked ; for as they came up to her, they found her a bonnie Scotch lassie of sixteen or seventeen, who sobbed at intervals, and kept casting tearful glances all around her. She carried in one hand her bonnet, in the other a bunch of flowers ; and the wind that had scattered the flowers, and left but a remnant in her hand, had also unloosed her nut-brown hair, and blown it in tangled masses about her face and neck. She stood aside, in a shamed way, to let the strangers pass ; but the Whaup stopped.

“What is the matter wi’ ye, lass ?” said he.

“I had my shoon and stockings in my bundle,” she said, while the tears welled up in her blue eyes, “and I hae dropped them out ; and I canna gang back the road to look for them, for I maun be in Saltcoats afore kye-time.”

“What does she say ?” asked Coquette.

“She has only lost her shoes and stockings, that’s all,” said the Whaup.

“But it is bad enough for her, I dare say.”

In an instant Coquette had out her purse—a dainty little Parisian thing, in mother-of-pearl, with filagree work round it—and taken therefrom two Napoleons.

“Here,” she said, going forward to the girl, “you must not cry more about that. Take my little present, and you will buy more shoes and more stockings for yourself.”

The girl eyed the money with some dismay ; and probably wondered if this was not a temptress who had suddenly appeared to offer her gold, and who spoke with a strange sound in her voice.

“Dinna be a sumph !” said the Whaup, who could talk

broadly enough when occasion demanded. "Take the money the leddy offers ye, and thank her for't."

The girl accepted the foreign-looking coins, and seemed much distressed that—like the peasantry of Scotland in general—she did not know how to express the gratitude she felt. Her thanks were in her eyes, and these spoke eloquently. But, just as her benefactors were moving on, a man came along the road with something dangling from his hands. Great was the joy of the girl on perceiving that he had found her lost property ; and, when he had come up and delivered the things to her, she advanced with the money to Coquette.

"Thank ye, mem," said she.

"Won't you keep the money, and buy something for your little brothers and sisters, if you have any ?"

This offer was declined, with just an inkling of pride in the girl's manner ; and the next instant she was hurrying to Saltcoats as fast as her bare feet could carry her.

Now, this incident had delayed the two runaways much longer than they suspected ; and, when they got down to Saltcoats, they were much later than they dreamed. Indeed, they never looked at the town clock in passing, so satisfied were they that they had plenty of time.

"This is not like St. Nazaire," said Coquette, decidedly.

"You have not seen it yet," returned the Whaup, just as confidently.

A few minutes afterwards Coquette and he stood upon the shore. The long bay of Saltcoats, sweeping round from the far promontory of Troon, fronted a heaving, tumbling mass of white-crested waves, that came rolling onward from under a great leaden breadth of sky ; and, as they gazed out on this wintry-looking sea, they had on their right hand the grey stone wall of the town, which projected into the water, with here and there a crumbling old house peeping over it. The church spire rose above the tallest of the houses, and aided the perspective—so much so that it was almost possible to imagine that the site of the building had been chosen by one who had studied the picturesque opportunities of the place.

"It is St. Nazaire in winter !" cried Coquette, her voice half lost in the roar of the waves.

“Didn’t I tell you?” triumphantly shouted the Whaup, who had never seen St. Nazaire, but only knew that, on this side, Saltcoats looked singularly like a little French walled town. “Now will you come and see the harbour?”

But she would not leave. She stood there, with her shawl fluttering in the fierce wind, and with her slight form scarcely able to withstand the force of the hurricane, looking out on the rushing white crests of the waves, on the black line of the town perched above the rocks, and on the lowering western sky, which seemed to be slowly advancing with its gloom. There was no sign of life near them—not even a sailor on the watch, nor a ship running before the gale—nothing but the long and level shore, and the great wild mass of waves, which had a voice like thunder far out beyond the mere dashing on the beach.

“Imagine what it would be,” she said, “to have one you loved out in a fearful storm, and for you to come down here at night to hear the savage message that the waves bring. It would make me mad. You will not go to sea?” she added suddenly, turning to him with an urgent pleading in her face and her voice.

“No—of course not,” he said, looking strangely at her.

Was it possible, then, that this vague determination of his had lingered in her mind as a sort of threat? Did she care to have him remain near her?

“Come,” said he, “we must hurry, if you mean to look at the harbour and the old ruins at the point. Besides, I want you to rest for a minute or two at an inn here, and you shall see whether there is no *vin ordinaire* in the country except at Earlshope.”

“Earlshope—Earlshope,” she said. “Why do you talk always of Earlshope?”

The Whaup would not answer, but led her back through the town, and stopped on their way to the harbour at the Saracen’s Head. Here Coquette had a biscuit and a glass of claret; and was further delighted to perceive that the window of the room they were in looked out upon a very French-looking courtyard of stone, surrounded by a high wall which appeared to front the sea.

“It is St. Nazaire in winter,” she repeated; “the grey

stones, the windy sea, the chill air. Yet how dark it becomes !”

Indeed, when they had resumed their journey, and gone out to the point beyond the little harbour, the gale had waxed much more fierce. They passed through the ruins of what seemed an ancient fortress on to the rocks, and found themselves alone in front of the sea, which had now become of a lurid green. It was, in fact, much lighter in colour than the sombre sky above ; and the grey-green waves, tumbling in white, could be seen for an immense distance under this black canopy of cloud. The wind whistled around them, and dashed the spray into their blinded eyes. The wildness of the scene—the roaring of wind and sea around—produced a strange excitement in the girl ; and while she clung to the Whaup’s arm to steady herself on the rocks, she laughed aloud in defiance of the storm. At this moment a glare of steel-blue light flashed through the driving gloom in front of them ; and almost simultaneously there was a rattle of thunder overhead, which reverberated far and long among the Arran hills. Then came the rain ; and they could hear the hissing of it on the sea before it reached them.

“Shall we make for the town ?” cried the Whaup, “or shelter ourselves in the ruins ?”

He had scarcely spoken when another wild glare burst before their eyes, and made them stagger back ; while the rattle of the thunder seemed all around their ears.

“Are you hurt ?” said Coquette, for her companion did not speak.

“I think not,” said the Whaup ; “but my arm tingles up to the elbow, and I can scarcely move it. This is close work. We must hide in the ruins, or you will be wet through.”

They went inside the old building ; and crept down and sat mute and expectant under Coquette’s outstretched plaid. All around them was the roaring of the waves, with the howling of the gusts of wind and rain ; and ever and anon the rough stone walls before them would be lit up by a flash of blue lightning, which stunned their eyes for several seconds.

“This is a punishment that we ran away,” said Coquette.

“Nonsense !” said the Whaup. “This storm will wreck many a boat ; and it would be rather hard if a lot of sailors should be drowned merely to give us a drouking.”

“What is that?”

“A wetting, such as we are likely to get. Indeed, I don’t think there is much use in stopping here; for it will soon be so dark that we shall not be able to get along the rocks to the shore.”

This consideration made them rise and leave at once; and sure enough it had grown very dark within the past half-hour. Night was rapidly approaching as they made their way through Saltcoats to gain the road to Airlie. Nor did the storm abate one jot of its fury; and long before they had begun to ascend towards the moorland country, the Whaup was as wet as though he had been lying in a river. Coquette’s thick plaid saved her somewhat.

“What shall we do?” she said. “They will be very angry, and this time they have reason.”

“I shouldn’t care whether they were angry or not,” said the Whaup, “if only you were at home and in dry clothes.”

“But you are wetter than I am.”

“But I don’t care,” said the Whaup, although his teeth were chattering in his head.

So they struggled on, in the darkness, and wind, and driving rain, until it seemed to Coquette that the way under foot was strangely spongy and wet. She said nothing, however, until the Whaup exclaimed, in a serious voice—

“We are off the road, and on the moor somewhere.”

Such was the fact. They had got up to the high land only to find themselves lost in a morass, with no means of securing the slightest guidance. There was nothing for it but to blunder on helplessly through the dark, trusting to find some indication of their whereabouts. At last they came to an enclosure and a footpath; and as they followed this, hoping to reach the Airlie road, they came upon a small house, which had a light in its windows.

“It is Earlshope Lodge,” said the Whaup. “And there are the gates.”

“Oh, let us go in and beg for some shelter,” said Coquette, whose courage had forsaken her the moment she found they had lost their way.

“You may,” said a voice from the mass of wet garments beside her, “you may go in, and get dry clothes, if you like; but I will not.”

CHAPTER IX.

COQUETTE'S PROMISE.

"Good morning, Miss Cassilis," said Lord Earlshope, as he met Coquette coming over the moorland road. "I hear you had an adventure last night. But why did not you go into the lodge and get dried?"

"Why?" said Coquette—"why, because my cousin Tom and I were as wet as we could be, and it was better to go on straight to the Manse without waiting. Have you seen him this morning?"

"Your cousin? No."

"I am looking for him. I think he believes he is in disgrace at the Manse, and has gone off for some wild mischief. He has taken all his brothers with him; and I did hear him laughing and singing as he always does when he—how do you call it?—when he breaks out."

"Let me help you to look for him," said Earlshope. "I am sure he ought to be proud of your solicitude, if anything is wanted to make him happier than he is. How thoroughly that handsome lad seems to enjoy the mere routine of living!"

"You talk as if you were an old man," said Coquette, with one of her bright laughs. "Do not you enjoy living?"

"Enjoy it? No. If the days pass easily, without much bother, I am contented; but happiness does not visit a man who looks upon himself as a failure at twenty-seven."

"I do not understand you," said Coquette, with a puzzled air.

"You would provoke me into talking about myself, as if I were a hypochondriac. Yet I have no story—nothing to amuse you with."

"Oh, I do wish you to tell me all about yourself," said Coquette, with a gracious interest. "Why you remain by yourself in this place? Why you have no companions—no occupation? You are mysterious."

"I am not even that," he said, with a smile. "I have

not even a mystery. Yet I will tell you all about myself, if you care to hear, as we go along. Stop me when I tire you."

So her companion began and told her all about himself and his friends, his college life, his relations, his acquaintances, his circumstances—a rather lengthy narrative, which need not be repeated here. Coquette learned a great deal during that time, however, and saw for the first time Lord Earlshope in a true light. He was no longer to her a careless and light-hearted young man, who had made her acquaintance out of indolent curiosity, and seemed inclined to flirt with her for mere amusement. He was, in his own words, a failure at twenty-seven—a man whose extremely morbid disposition had set to work years ago to eat into his life. He had had his aspirations and ambitions; and had at length convinced himself that he had not been granted the intellect to accomplish any of his dreams. What remained to him?

"I was not fit to do anything," he said, "with those political, social, and other instruments that are meant to secure the happiness of multitudes. All I could do was to try to secure my own happiness, and help the philanthropists by a single unit."

"Have you done that?" said Coquette.

"No," he rejoined, with a careless shrug, "I think I have failed in that, too. All my life I have been cutting open my bellows to see where the wind came from; and if you were to go over Earlshope, you would discover the remains of twenty different pursuits that I have attempted and thrown aside. Do you know, Miss Cassilis, that I have even ceased to take any interest in the problem of myself—in the spectacle of a man physically as strong as most men, and mentally so vacillating that he has never been able to hold an opinion or get up a prejudice to swear by. Even the dumbest men have convictions about politics; but I am a Tory in sympathy and a Radical in theory, so that I am at war with myself on pretty nearly every point. Sometimes I have fancied that there are a good many men in this country more or less in my condition; and then it has occurred to me that an invasion of England would be a good thing."

"Ah, you would have something to believe in then—something to fight for!" said Coquette.

"Perhaps. Yet I don't know. If the invaders should happen to have better educational institutions than England—as is very likely—oughtn't I to fight on their side, and wish them to be successful, and give us a lesson? England, you know, owes everything to successive invasions; for the proper test of the invader's political institutions was whether they could hold their own in the country after he had planted his foot there. But I have really to beg your pardon. I must not teach you the trick of following everything to the vanishing point. You have the greatest of earthly blessings; you enjoy life without asking yourself why."

"But I do not understand," said Coquette, "how I can enjoy more than you. Is it not pleasant to come out in the sunshine like this, after the night's rain, and see the clear sky, and smell the sweet air? You enjoy that——"

"I cannot help wondering what appetite it will give me."

Coquette made an impatient gesture with her hands.

"At least you do enjoy speaking with me here on this pleasant morning?"

"The more we talk," he said, "the more I am puzzled by the mystery of the difference between you and me. Why, the passing of a bright-coloured butterfly is an intense pleasure to you! I have seen you look up to a gleam of blue sky, and clasp your hands, and laugh with delight. Every scent of a flower, every pleasant sound, every breath of sunshine and air, is a new joy to you; and you are quite satisfied with merely being alive. Of course, it is an advantage to be alive; but there are few who make so much of it as you do."

"You think too much about it," said Coquette; "when you marry some day, you will have more practical things to think of, and you will be happier."

At the mention of the word marriage a quick look of annoyance seemed to pass across his face; but she did not notice it, and he replied lightly,

"Marriages are made in heaven, Miss Cassilis; and I am afraid they won't do much for me there."

"Ah! do not you believe in heaven?" she said, and the brown eyes were turned anxiously to his face.

"Do not let us talk about that," said he, indifferently; "I do not wish to alienate from me the only companion I have ever found in this place. Yet I do not disbelieve in what you believe, I know. What were you saying about marriage?" he added, with an apparent effort; "do you believe that marriages are made in heaven?"

"I do not know," replied Coquette; "the people say that sometimes."

"I was only thinking," remarked Lord Earlshope, with an apparently careless laugh, "that if the angels employ their leisure in making marriages, they sometimes turn out a very inferior article. Don't you think so?"

Coquette was not a very observant young person—she was much too occupied with her own round of innocent little enjoyments; but it did strike her that her companion spoke with a touch of bitterness in his tone. However, they did not pursue the subject further, for, much to their surprise, they suddenly stumbled upon the Whaup and his brothers.

The boys were at a small bridge crossing the stream that ran down from Airlie moor; and they were so intent upon their own pursuits that they took no notice of the approach of Coquette and her companion. Lord Earlshope, indeed, at once motioned to Coquette to preserve silence; and, aided by a line of small alder and hazel bushes which grew on the banks of the rivulet, they drew quite near to the Minister's sons without being perceived.

Coquette was right: the Whaup had "broken out." Feeling assured that he would be held responsible for all the crimes of yesterday—the affair of the crucifix, the clandestine excursion to Saltecoats, and the mishaps that accrued therefrom—the Whaup had reflected that it was as well to be hanged for a sheep as a lamb. When Coquette and her companion came in sight of him, he was fulfilling the measure of his iniquities.

What had moved him to vent his malignity on his younger brother Wattie must remain a mystery—unless it was that Wattie was the "best boy" of the Manse, and, further, that he had shown an enmity to Coquette; but at

this moment Wattie was depending from the small bridge, his head a short distance from the water, his feet held close to the parapet by the muscular arms of the Whaup, while one of the other boys had been made an accomplice to the extent of holding on to Wattie's trousers.

"Noo, Wattie," said the Whaup, "ye maun say a sweer before ye get up. I'm no jokin', and unless ye be quick, ye'll be in the water."

But would Wattie, the paragon of scholars, the exemplar to his brothers, imperil his soul by uttering a "bad word?" Surely not! Wattie was resolute. He knew what punishment was held in reserve for swearers; and preferred the colder element.

"Wattie," said the Whaup, "say a sweer, or ye'll gang into the burn, as sure as daith!"

No; Wattie would rather be a martyr. Whereupon—the bridge being a very low one—the Whaup and his brothers dipped Wattie a few inches, so that the ripples touched his head. Wattie set up a fearful howl; and his brothers raised him to his former position.

"Now, will ye say it?"

"*Deevil!*" cried Wattie. "Let me up; I hae said a sweer."

The other brothers raised a demoniac shout of triumph over this apostacy; and the Whaup's roars of laughter had nearly the effect of precipitating Wattie into the stream in downright earnest. But this backsliding on the part of their pious brother did not seem to the tempters sufficiently serious.

"Ye maun say a worse sweer, Wattie. '*Deevil*' is no bad enough."

"I'll droon first!" said Wattie, whimpering in his distress, "and then ye'll get your paiks, I'm thinking."

Down went Wattie's head into the burn again; and this time he was raised with his mouth sputtering out the contents it had received.

"I'll say what ye like—I'll say what ye like! *D—n*; is that bad enough?"

With another unholy shout of derision, Wattie was raised and set on the bridge.

"Noo," said the Whaup, standing over him, "let me tell

you this, my man. The next time ye gang to my faither, and tell a story about any one o' us, or the next time ye say a word against the French lassie, as ye ca' her, do ye ken what I'll do? I'll take ye back to my faither by the lug, and I'll tell him ye were swearin' like a trooper down by the burn; and every one o' us will testify against ye. Ma certes, my man, I'm thinking it will be your turn to consider paiks. My faither has a bonnie switch, Wattie—a braw switch, Wattie; and what think ye he'll do to his well-behaved son that gangs about the countryside swearin' just like a Kilmarnock carter?"

Coquette held out her hand to her companion.

"Good-bye," she said, "and I do thank you for bringing me here."

Lord Earlshope perceived that he was dismissed, but did not know why. He was not aware that Coquette was trembling lest she should be seen in his forbidden company.

"Shall I see you to-morrow?" he said, as he took her hand.

"When it is fine I do always go out for a walk after breakfast," she said lightly; and so they parted.

CHAPTER X.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

COQUETTE would have given much to have recalled these words. She felt that they implied a promise; and that if she kept her promise she would find herself hampered by the weight of a secret. Now, the girl abhorred every sort of restraint that interfered with the natural cheerfulness and lightness of her heart; and no sooner had Lord Earlshope disappeared, than she began to dread this thing that she had done. Why had he asked her to meet him? Why did not he come to the Manse? And while she stood irresolute, wondering how she could free herself from the chains that seemed likely to bind her, the Whaup and his brother made a dash at the place of her concealment.

"Hillo!" cried her cousin Tom, "how did you come here?"

"I came in search of you," she said, glancing nervously round to see that Lord Earlshope was out of sight.

"And you were spying on us, were you?" said the Whaup, with a laugh.

"Why do you ill-treat your brother so?" she said.

"It is no ill-treatment," he said, in his best English. "It is the execution o' a sentence passed on him last night by the whole of us. We are the Vehmgericht of this neighbourhood, Miss Coquette, and when any one injures you appeal to us. You have only to name him and we hamstring his cattle, set fire to his barns, and seize himself and pull out his teeth. Eh, boys?"

There was a general chorus of assent.

"But you must not call me by that name any more," said the young lady, with a blush.

"Not Coquette any more? I shall withdraw the name when I see you don't deserve it," said the Whaup, with cool insolence. It was clear he had "broken out."

The Whaup now dismissed his brothers, and proceeded to escort Coquette back across the moor. He explained, however, that he did not think it advisable for him to go into the Manse just then.

"Why?" said Coquette. "I told Mr. Cassilis all about it—he does not think you to blame."

"That means," said her companion, "that you took the blame on yourself. But you only know the half."

With which the Whaup broke into another fit of laughter. When he had recovered, he told her the story. That morning, on issuing out, he heard Andrew and Leezibeth talking about his cousin in a not very complimentary fashion, and at once determined on revenge. There was an outhouse in which were kept garden utensils, coals, and various other things, and this outhouse had a door which was occasionally obstinate. Now the Whaup seeing Andrew at the far end of the garden, informed him that Mr. Cassilis wanted a spade brought to him; and Andrew muttered "by and by." Meanwhile, the Whaup made his way to the outhouse, opened the door, and shut himself in. Two or three minutes afterwards, Andrew came and lifted the latch. The door would not open. He shoved and shook; it would not open

—for the simple reason that the Whaup, who could see through a chink, had his foot against it. At last, Andrew, obviously very angry, retired a few yards—made a race—and threw the whole of his weight upon the door. There was a crash, a stumble, a cry, and then a great pealing shriek of merriment as the Whaup jumped out of the place, leaving Andrew lying among a heap of tumbled pitchforks and hand-barrows. The door had yielded so easily that Andrew had precipitated himself upon the floor of the out-house, and now lay groaning.

“I don’t know what he said,” remarked the Whaup, as he recounted the adventure with great glee, “but it didna sound to me like the Psalms of David.”

“Tom,” said his cousin, “you are a wicked boy. Why do you not give up these school jokes? You are tall and strong enough to be a man: why you behave as if you were at school?”

The Whaup was not in a repentant mood.

“I’m only half and between,” said he. “I am a man some days—a boy others. You can’t expect me to change all at once, Miss Coquette.”

“You must not call me that name,” said she. “It is not fair—I am not Coquette.”

“Oh, indeed,” said he. “When did you see Lord Earls-hope?”

“This morning,” said she, with a pout.

The Whaup was instantly sobered.

“Was Earls-hope at the Manse?” he asked, coldly.

Now was the time for Coquette to make a full confession. Indeed, she had admitted having seen Lord Earls-hope that morning for the very purpose of telling the Whaup all about her half-promise, and so relieving her mind from its burden of secresy. But as she looked at him, she saw that his face had grown implacable. She had not the courage to tell him. She said, in a timid way—

“He met me as I was coming to look for you, and walked a bit of the way with me.”

“How far?”

Coquette drew herself up somewhat.

“You have not the right to ask me such questions.”

“I understand now,” said the Whaup, calmly, “how you

looked *caught* when I found you at the bushes, and why you turned to look over the moor. I daresay he had come there with you, and sneaked away——”

“Sneaked!—sneaked!” said Coquette, warmly (although she only guessed at the meaning of the word), “I do not know what it is; but Lord Earlshope is not afraid to be seen. Why should he be? What is wrong in his going with me there? And you think I do not know what is right for me to do?”

“Ah, well,” said the Whaup, with an air of resignation. “I give you up. I see you are just like other women.”

“What do you mean?” said Coquette, angrily, though she kept her eyes down.

“Nothing of any importance,” said the Whaup, with a forced carelessness. “You profess you were doing what was right and fitting; but you have not explained why you should have sent Earlshope away—after all, he is a man, and would not have sneaked off except at your bidding—or why you carefully hid from the whole of us that you had just left him. What was the reason of all that concealment and hypocrisy?” he added, with a touch of indignation. “I know you were doing no wrong—I have no fear in that way for one that bears the name of Cassilis. But why make the pretence of having done wrong? Why try to hide it? Isn’t that very woman-like?—isn’t that very deceitful?—and I thought you were something different from other women.”

She was nearly confessing the truth to him—that she had resorted to this unfortunate bit of concealment merely because she was afraid of him. But she knew that if she made this admission she would probably break down; and, as she would not show any such symptom of weakness, she merely replied to him, with an air of proud indifference—

“I cannot help it, if I am a woman.”

Thereafter, dead silence. The two walked across the moor, some little distance apart, without uttering a word. When they reached the Manse, Coquette went to her own room and shut herself up, feeling very stern, determined, and wretched.

The Whaup, on the other hand, rendered desperate, resolved to deliver himself up into the hands of justice. He

walked into his father's study in order to impeach himself and demand punishment (the Whaup felt that banishment from Airlie would almost have been welcome then), but Mr. Cassilis was outside in the garden. When the Whaup at length perceived his father and approached him, he found that the Schoolmaster was seeking an audience.

The Schoolmaster was a short, stout, red-haired man, with horn-rimmed spectacles. He had a bushy red beard, and held his head well drawn back ; so that, but for his defective stature, he would have looked a person of importance. However, Nature, not generous as regards inches, had been kinder to him in his voice, which was deep and sonorous ; and it was the especial pride of Mr. Æneas Gillespie—Schoolmaster, Parish Clerk, and Grand Aumonier of Airlie—that he spoke a species of idiomatic English superior to the talk of the common people his neighbours. It was only on rare occasions that he forgot himself, and relapsed into the familiar and expressive phraseology of the district.

"It is a fine—I might even say a beautiful—morning," he observed to Mr. Cassilis, as he came up.

"A beautiful morning, indeed," said the Minister.

At this moment the Whaup made his appearance, and was at once saluted by the Schoolmaster.

"Come along, young man," he said, in his stately tones, "we may ask your aid, or, as I may say, your assistance, in this matter. Mr. Cassilis, may I inquire of you what is your opinion of the present Lord Earlshope—by which, I mean, do you think him a fit companion for one o' your household ?"

The Schoolmaster planted himself before the Minister, and fixed the glare of his horn-rimmed spectacles on him.

"The question is a wide one, Mr. Gillespie," said the Minister, with a smile. "I do not think we ought to set ourselves up in judgment upon our neighbours who may have been brought up under different lights from ours, and may surprise us at times, I admit, by their conduct. Nor would it be fitting for them who try to walk according to the Word to cut themselves off from all communication with people who are less particular—for these might benefit by example and the kindly teaching of acquaintanceship."

Mr. Gillespie shook his head.

"I would not interfere with your section of the public duties of this parish," observed the Schoolmaster. "You are the arbiter of morals and conduct, while I do my humble best—my endeavour, as I may say—with the education of our joint charge. But if ye will let me remark, sir, that we may be too easy with our judgment, and encourage ungodliness by associating therewith. For I would ask ye, Mr. Cassilis, if we are to draw no line between the good and the bad, what is the good—what is the good, as I may say—of being good?"

The Whaup grew very red in the face, and "snirted" with laughter.

"There are, Mr. Cassilis," continued the Schoolmaster, without pausing for an answer, "there are those who err knowingly, and should not be encouraged; there are those who err in ignorance, and should be informed. Of these last, by way of example, is Mrs. Drumsynie, the wife of a carter in Dalry, who was taken home on Tuesday last with a broken leg. Now, this woman had so far misconstrued the workings of Providence, as I may say, that when her husband was brought in to her on a shutter, she exclaimed, 'I thank the Lord we will get something out o' the Society at last'—meaning the Benefit Society, of which I am the secretary. This woman, as I judge, was not to be taken as an irreverent or wicked woman, but as one suffering from—or labouring under, as I may say—a misapprehension."

"I perceive, Mr. Gillespie," said Mr. Cassilis, gravely, "but ye were observing——?"

"I am coming to the point, sir. And I think I cannot do better than premise with a simple statement of fact. At this moment, or instant, as I may say, your niece is out walking alone with Lord Earlshope."

The Whaup's face flushed with something else than laughter this time—when he saw the object of the Schoolmaster's visit.

"Ye may premise what ye like," said the lad, indignantly, "but that's a *doggont lee*!"

"Thomas!" cried the Minister, "ye shall answer for this afterward."

But the Whaup was determined to have it out with his enemy.

"At this moment, or instant, as I may say," he remarked (and the Schoolmaster dared scarcely believe he was listening to such insolence from a boy whom he had many a time thrashed), "Mr. Cassilis's niece is in this house, and not with Lord Earlshope at all. And suppose she had been, what then? Is it a crime for a girl even to speak to him if she meets him? Is it worse than for an old man to come spying and telling tales? And if an honest woman must not walk with Earlshope, would an honest man sit down at his table? And who was it, Mr. Gillespie, proposed Lord Earlshope's health at the last tenantry dinner?"

This was a deadly thrust; and, having delivered it, the Whaup walked off. He was angry that he had been goaded into defending Lord Earlshope; but his zeal in the cause of Coquette had carried him beyond such considerations. He looked up at her window rather sadly as he passed.

"I suppose I shall be sent to Glasgow for this," he said to himself; "and she does not know it was done for her sake."

The Schoolmaster and the Minister were left looking at each other.

"I am apprehensive of that lad's future," remarked the Schoolmaster, "if he gives way to such unruly gusts of passion, and betrays the symptoms—the evidences, I might even say—of a lawless and undisciplined mind."

"We will leave that for the present, Mr. Gillespie," said the Minister, rather impatiently. "I will examine his conduct later on. In the meantime, you have something to say about my niece."

"She may be in the house——," began the Schoolmaster.

"She *is* in the house," said the Minister, decisively.

"None of my boys has ever been known to tell a lie."

"At all events, Mr. Cassilis, with my own eyes did I see her walking with that young man. That is all I have to say. I leave it to you to judge whether such conduct is becoming to one who may be regarded, or considered, as your daughter; or, indeed, whether it is safe for herself. We have a duty—an obligation, I might even call it—to consider how our actions look in the eyes of our neighbour, so as not to offend, but to walk decently and uprightly——"

"Mr. Gillespie," said the Minister, interrupting him somewhat rudely, "you may depend on it that my niece has no

clandestine relations with Lord Earlshope. It is not many days since they met each other for the first time. I have no doubt that when you saw them together it was but a chance meeting. You would not have them fly from each other?"

The Schoolmaster shook his head. He was beginning a serious discourse on the duties of "professors," when the Minister was forced to remind his visitor that this was the morning on which he began his studies for the succeeding Sabbath, and that he would be obliged to postpone further mention of the matter at present.

"We may return to it again at a more convenient season," said the Schoolmaster, as he took his leave, "seeing the importance of one in your position, Mr. Cassilis, being above reproach in all your ways and actions in this parish."

All that day, and all that evening, Coquette was very silent, proud, and miserable. Once only she saw the Whaup; but he went away from her in another direction. It was understood in the Manse that something serious with regard to the Whaup was in the wind. For more than an hour in the afternoon he was in his father's study; and when he came out, he spent the rest of the day in looking over his live pets—he supported a considerable stock of animals—and visiting his favourite haunts in the neighbourhood, just as if he were going away.

Next morning Coquette met him at breakfast; he did not speak to her. If he had even said good morning, she fancied she would have burst into tears and begged his forgiveness, and told him all that oppressed her. But again, as she saw him silent and reserved—grave, indeed, far beyond his wont—she put it down to pride; and then she in her turn grew proud, and closed her lips with an inflexible air, and felt supremely wretched.

Some little time after they had dispersed from the breakfast table, the Whaup saw Coquette cross the courtyard, with her small hat and shawl on. When she perceived him, she walked rather timidly to him, and said,

"I am going for a walk; I shall be glad if you will come with me."

"Where are you going?" he asked, coldly.

"In the direction I went yesterday. I promised to go;

I do think it likely I shall meet Lord Earlishope, that is why I want you to come with me."

"You promised to meet him, and now ask me to join ; no, thank you. I should be the third wheel of the cart."

He turned and went away. She looked after him. A few minutes before she had resolved she would not go for this walk ; she would rather break that slightly-given promise. But when she saw him go away like that, her lips were again pressed proudly and determinedly together ; and she raised the latch of the green gate and passed out into the moorland road.

CHAPTER XI.

A MEETING ON THE MOOR.

"I AM very miserable," said Coquette, struggling bravely to restrain her tears.

"You miserable ?" cried Lord Earlishope, whom she met before she had gone five hundred yards from the Manse. "It is impossible ! I do not think you have the capacity to be miserable. But what is the matter ? Tell me all about it."

It was a dangerous moment for the exhibition of kindness. She felt herself an exile from the Manse, and receiving comfort and sympathy from a stranger.

She told him her story, rapidly, and in French. To have the burden of a foreign tongue removed was in itself a consolation to her ; and she found inexpressible relief in being able to talk fully and freely about all her surroundings at the Manse—about her relations with a number of people so unlike her in temperament and bringing-up—about these present circumstances which seemed to be conspiring to goad her into some desperate act.

Earlishope listened patiently and attentively, deeply interested, and yet inclined to smile sometimes.

"I should laugh at all that," said he, when she had finished, "because I am a man ; and men are indifferent to these delicate considerations chiefly because they can avoid them. If a man dislikes the people he is among, he has merely to go away. But a woman is very dependent on the temper

and disposition of those around her ; and you especially seem almost without resource. You have no other relatives ? ”

“ No,” said Coquette.

“ No lady-friend with whom you could stay ? ”

“ Many—many with whom I should like to stay,” said the girl, “ but they are all in France ; and I have been sent here. Yet you must not misunderstand what I do say. I do not dislike my relatives. My uncle is a very good man, and very kind to me. My cousin, I do think, is more than kind to me, and ready to incur danger in defending my faults. The other people cannot be angry with me ; for I have done them no harm. Yet everything is wrong—I do not know how. At this moment I know myself very guilty in coming to see you ; and I should not have come but that Cousin Tom would not speak to me.”

“ I think Cousin Tom has been quarrelling with you about me,” said Earlshope.

He spoke very quietly, and with rather an amused air ; but Coquette was startled and a little alarmed. She did not wish her companion to know that he had anything to do with what had occurred.

“ Now,” said Lord Earlshope, “ it would be a great pity if I were the cause of any of your troubles. You see I have no companions here—you have not many. It seemed to me that we might often have a very pleasant chat or walk together ; but I must not be selfish. You must not suffer anything on my account ; so, if your friends at the Manse are inclined to mistake our brief acquaintanceship, let it cease. I do not like to see you as you are. You are evidently out of sorts, for you have never laughed this morning yet—nor run off the road—nor paid the least attention to the sunlight or the colours of the sea out yonder. I should far prefer looking at you from a distance as an entire stranger—if I could see you, as you usually are, fluttering about like a butterfly, enjoying the warmth, and the colours, and light around you, without a care, and quite unconscious how perfectly happy you are.”

As Coquette heard these words, uttered in a cruelly calm and kindly voice, she became afraid. What was this strange aching sense of disappointment that filled her heart ?

Why was it that she contemplated with dismay a proposal which he had clearly shown would secure her happiness and peace ? She was miserable before ; she was ten times more wretched now.

He did not seem to notice any alteration in her expression or manner. They had got to the crest of a hill from which the line of the coast was visible ; with a plain of sunlit sea beyond ; and Arran lying like a great blue cloud on the horizon. A faint haze of heat filled the south ; and the distant Ailsa Craig was of a pearly grey.

Coquette's companion uttered an exclamation.

"Do you see that yacht ?" said he, pointing to a vessel which the distance rendered very small—a schooner yacht with her two masts lying rakishly back, and her white sails shining in the sun, as she cut through the green water with a curve of white round her prow.

"It is a stunning little boat," said Coquette simply, returning to the English which she had picked up from her father.

Lord Earlshope did not laugh at her blunder as the Whaup would have laughed. He merely said—

"She has been lying at Greenock to be overhauled and set to rights ; and I telegraphed to have the name altered as well. The first time you go down to Ardrrossan you will find lying there a yacht bearing the name—COQUETTE."

"Do you know," said Coquette, breaking at last into a smile, "everybody did use to call me that ?"

"So I heard from one of your cousins the other day," said her companion.

"And you called the boat for me ?" she said, with a look of wonder.

"Yes ; I took the liberty of naming it after your pet name—I hope you are not angry with me ?"

"No," she said, "I am very well pleased—very much—it is a very kind compliment to do that, is it not ? But you have not told me you had a yacht."

"It is one of my abandoned amusements. I wanted to surprise you, though ; and I had some wild hope of inveigling Mr. Cassilis, yourself, and your cousin into going for a day or two's cruise up some of the lochs—Loch Fyne, Loch Linnhe, or some of these. It would have been pleasant for

you, I think, as you don't know anything of the West Highland lochs and mountains. The scenery is the most varied of any I have ever seen, and more picturesque in the way of colour. You can have no idea of the wildness of the northern sunsets ; and of late I have been picturing you sitting on deck with us in the twilight—the stillness of the place—the calling of the wild-fowl—the dense and mysterious darkness of the mountains in the glow of cold, clear light. Do you think Mr. Cassilis would have gone ? ”

“ I do not know,” said Coquette.

She was becoming hard and obdurate again. He had spoken of his project as a thing of the past. It was no longer possible ; but the mere mention of it had filled Coquette with a wistful longing. It would have been pleasant indeed to have gone away on this dream-like excursion, and wandered round the lonely islands, and up the great stretches of sea-lochs of which her father had many a time spoken to her when she was a child. Nevertheless, since her companion had chosen to give up the proposal, she would not ask him to reconsider his resolve. They were about to become strangers : well and good.

“ I must go back now,” she said.

He looked at her with some surprise.

“ Have I offended you by telling you what I had been dreaming about ? After all, it was but a fancy—and I beg your pardon for not saying first of all that I was far from sure that you yourself would go, even had I persuaded Mr. Cassilis.”

“ No, you have not offended me,” said Coquette. “ Your thought was very kind. But I am sorry it is all over.”

“ I see I have not brought you peace of mind yet,” he said, gently. “ You are not Miss Cassilis—may I say that you are not *Coquette*?—this morning. What can I do for you ? I wish you would talk to me as if I were your elder brother, and tell me if there is anything in which I can help you. Shall I go up to the Maunse and hint to Mr. Cassilis that—that—well, to tell you the truth, I should be at a loss to know what to hint.”

He smiled ; but she was quite grave.

“ There is nothing,” she said. “ They are very good to me—what more ? Do not let us talk of it any more. Let

us talk of something else. Why do you never go in your yacht ? ”

“ Because I lost interest in it, as I lost interest in a dozen other things. Steeple-chasing was my longest-lived hobby, I think, for I used to be rather successful. Riding nine stone six, with a five-pound saddle, I had a pretty fair share of luck.”

“ And now you only read books, and smoke, and fell trees in the cold weather to make you warm. What books ? Romances ? ”

“ Yes ; and the more improbable the better.”

“ You get interested ? ”

“ Yes : but not in the story. I read the story and try to look at the brain of the writer all the time. Then you begin to wonder at the various notions of the world these various heads have conceived. If I were a physiologist, I should like to read a novel, and draw a picture of the author gathered from the colouring and sentiments of his book.”

“ That is all so very morbid,” she said. “ And in your poetry, too, I suppose you like the—ah, I cannot say what I mean.”

“ But I understand all the same,” he said, laughing ; “ and I am going to disappoint you, if you have formed a theory. I like old-fashioned poetry, and especially the lyrics of the old dramatists. Then poetry was as wide as life itself, and included everything that could interest a man. A writer was not afraid to talk of everyday experiences, and was gay, or patriotic, or sarcastic, just as the moment suited. But don’t you think the poetry of the present time is only the expression of one mood—that it is permeated all through with sadness and religious melancholia ? What do you say, Mr. Cassilis ? ”

The abrupt question was addressed to the Minister. Coquette had been walking carelessly onward, with her eyes bent on the ground ; and had not perceived the approach of her uncle. When she heard the sudden termination of Earlshope’s disquisition on poetry, she looked up with a start, and turned pale. The Minister’s eyes she found fixed upon her, and she dared not return that earnest look.

“ I beg your pardon, Lord Earlshope ? ” said Mr. Cassilis, looking calmly at both of them.

"I was victimising your niece, whom I had the good fortune to meet, with a sermon on modern poetry," said Lord Earlshope, lightly; "and, as she seemed to pay no attention to me, I appealed to you. However, the subject is not an enticing one—as Miss Cassilis apparently discovered. Which way are you walking? Shall we join you?"

The deep-set eyes of the Minister, under the shaggy eyebrows, were closely regarding the speaker during the utterance of these words. Mr. Cassilis was satisfied—so far as Lord Earlshope was concerned. No actor could have been so obviously and wholly at ease—the fact being that the young man did not even suspect that he had become an object of suspicion. He had not inveigled the Minister's niece into a secret interview; on the contrary, he had, mainly by chance, met a pleasant and pretty neighbour out for her morning walk, and why should he not speak to her?

But when the Minister turned to Coquette he found a different story written on her face—a story that caused him some concern. She appeared at once embarrassed and distressed. She said nothing, and looked at neither of them; but there was in her eyes (bent on a bit of heather she was pulling to pieces) an expression of constraint and disquiet, which was plainly visible to him, if not to Lord Earlshope.

"If you will relieve me from the duties of escort," said the latter to Mr. Cassilis, "I think I shall bid you both good morning, as I have to walk over to Altyre Farm and back before luncheon."

So he parted from them, Coquette not daring to look up as he shook hands with her. She and the Minister were left alone.

For a minute or two they walked on in silence; and it seemed to Coquette that the hour of her deepest tribulation had come. So bright and happy had been the life of this young creature that with her to be downcast was to be miserable: to be suspected was equivalent to being guilty. Suspicion she could not bear; secrecy seemed to suffocate her; and she had now but one despairing notion in her head—to escape and fly from this lonely northern region into which she had been sent—to get away from a combination of circumstances that appeared likely to overwhelm her.

"Uncle," she said, "may I go back to France?"

"My child!" said Mr. Cassilis, in amazement, "what is the matter? Surely you do not mean that your short stay with us has been disagreeable to you? I have noticed, it is true, that you have of late been rather out o' sorts, but judged it was but some temporary indisposition. Has anything annoyed you—have you any cause of complaint?"

"Complaint?" she said; "when you have been so kind to me! No, no complaint. But I do think I am not good enough for this place—I am sorry I cannot satisfy, although I put away all my pictures, and books, and the crucifix, so that no one can see. But I am suspected—I do hear them talk of me as dangerous. It is natural—it is right, perhaps—but not pleasant to me. Just now," she added, desperately, "you think I did promise to meet Lord Earlshope, and you did come to take me home."

"Had you not promised?" said the Minister, looking steadily and yet affectionately at her.

For a second the girl's lip trembled; but the next moment she was saying rapidly, with something of wildness in her tone and manner—

"I did not promise; no. But I did expect to see him—I did hope to see him when I came out; and is it wrong? Is it wrong for me to speak to a stranger, when I do see him kind to me, in a place where there are not many amiable people? If it is wrong, it is because Lord Earlshope is not suspicious, and hard, and ill-judging, like the others. That is why they do say ill of him; that is why they persuade me to think ill of him. I do not; I will not. Since I left France I did meet no one so courteous—so friendly—as he has been. Why can I talk to him so easily? He does not think me wicked because I have a crucifix that my mother gave me—that is why we are friends; and he does not suspect me. But it is all over. We are not to be friends again; we may see each other to-morrow; we shall not speak. Shall I tell Leesiebess?—perhaps it will please her!"

She spoke with an angry and bitter vehemence, that was strangely out of consonance with her ordinary serenity of demeanour. The Minister took her hand gently in his, saying nothing at all, and led her back to the Manse.

CHAPTER XII.

COQUETTE'S CONQUESTS.

THERE ensued a long period of rain—day after day breaking sullen and cold, with a perpetual drizzle falling from a grey and cheerless sky. There were none of the sharp and heavy showers which a south-west gale brings, with dashes of blue between ; but a slow, fine, wetting rain, that rendered everything humid and limp, and hid the far-off line of the sea and the mountains of Arran behind a curtain of mist.

Perhaps it was the forced imprisonment caused by the rain that made Coquette look ill ; but, at all events, she grew so pale and listless that even the boys noticed it. All her former spirits were gone. She was no longer interested in their sports ; and taught them no more new games. She kept much to her own room, and read at a window. She read those books which she had brought with her from the sunny region of the Loire ; and when she turned from the open page to look out upon the wet and misty landscape all around, she came back again with a sigh to the volume on her knee.

Lord Earlshope never came near the Manse ; perhaps, she thought, he had left the country. The only communication she had with him was on the day following their last meeting. She then sent him a note consisting of but one line, which was—"Please do not call your boat *Coquette*." This missive she had entrusted to her cousin Wattie, who delivered it, and returned with the answer that Lord Earlshope had merely said "All right." Wattie, however, broke the confidence reposed in him ; and told his brothers that he had been sent with a message to Earlshope. The Whaup profited by this intelligence ; but punished Wattie all the same ; for on that night, Coquette heard murmurings and complainings underneath her window. She looked out. There was some starlight ; and she could indistinctly see a figure in white moving in the garden underneath that building, the upper storey of which, originally a hay-loft,

had been transformed into a dormitory for the boys. The cause of the disturbance soon became apparent. After the boys had undressed, the Whaup had wheedled or compelled Wattie into making a rush to the garden for some fruit. He had then taken advantage of his position to pull the ladder into the loft, by which mean device his brother was left standing below in his night-shirt. In vain Wattie petitioned to be let up to his bed. With his teeth chattering in his head, he entreated that at least his trousers might be flung down to him ; but he was not relieved from punishment until the Whaup had administered a severe lecture to him on the shabbiness of betraying a lady's confidence.

"I'll never do't again, as sure's I'm here !" said Wattie, who was feebly endeavouring to mitigate his sufferings by balancing himself on his toes—a feat in which he naturally failed.

"Since it is no likely to rain," said the Whaup, looking spitefully at the clear star-lit sky, "there is little use in keeping ye there, so ye may hae the ladder—ye sneak !"

The Whaup never spoke to Coquette about that letter ; but it was the occasion of his prolonging the estrangement which he had sternly decided upon. He deliberately ignored her presence. He would not complain of her keeping up what he imagined to be a clandestine correspondence ; neither would he take any steps to put an end to it. He contented himself with thinking that if ever there should be necessity for confronting Earlishope personally, and altering matters that way, there would be one person in the Manse ready to adventure something for the sake of Coquette.

Nevertheless, it was at this time, and it was through the Whaup's instrumentality, that Coquette achieved her first great victory in Airlie—a success which was but the beginning of a strange series of successes, and fraught with important consequences to her. It all fell about in this way. First, the Whaup relented. When the rain began, and he saw his French cousin mope and pine indoors,—when he saw how she was growing languid and listless, and still strove to be cheerful and amiable to those around her, his resolve broke down. By insensible degrees he tried to re-establish their old relations. He showed her little attentions, and performed towards her small acts of thought-

fulness and kindness, which she was not slow to acknowledge. He was not impudently and patronisingly good to her as he had been ; there was a certain restraint over his approaches ; but she met them all with that simplicity of gratitude which the dark eyes and the sweet face could so readily and effectually express when her imperfect English failed her. And the Whaup no longer corrected her blunders with his old scornful impatience.

One morning there was a temporary cessation of the rain.

"Why don't you go down and return the Pensioner's visit?" said the Whaup to Coquette.

"If you please, I will go."

For the first time for many a day these two went out of the Manse together. It was like a revival of old times—though the Whaup would not have believed you had you told him how short a space Coquette had actually lived in Airlie. The cold and damp wind brought a tinge of colour to the girl's cheeks ; the Whaup thought he had never seen her look so pleasant and charming.

While Coquette lingered in the small garden of the cottage, the Whaup went up to the door and told the Pensioner who had come to see him.

"Cot pless me!" he hastily exclaimed, looking down at his legs. "Keep her in sa garden till I change my breeks."

"What for?" said the Whaup.

"Dinna ye see sey are tartan!" cried Neil, in an excited whisper, "and sa French canna stand sa tartan."

"Nonsense!" said the Whaup. "She won't look at your trousers."

"It is no nonsense, but very good sense whatever," said the Highlandman ; "it wass two friends o' mine, and they went over to France sa very last year, and one o' them, sey took his bags and his luggage, and sey pulled sis way and sat way, and sey will sweer at him in French—but he will not know what it wass said to him—and sey will take many things from him, mirover, and he will not know why. But, said I to him, 'Tonald, will you have on your tartan plaid round your shoulders?' And says he, 'I had.' And said I to him, 'Did you will no ken how sa French canna stand sa tartan ever since Waterloo?'"

The Pensioner ran inside, and speedily re-appeared in plain grey. Then he came out, and bade Coquette welcome with a dignified courtesy that surprised her.

"You would not come to see me, so I have come to see you," she said to the old man.

"It wassna for the likes o' me to visit a letty," said Neil.

He dusted a chair with his sleeve, and asked her to sit down. Then he put three glasses on the table, and brought out a black bottle. He filled one of the glasses and offered it to Coquette.

"She canna drink whisky!" said the Whaup, with a rude laugh.

"It is sa rale Lagavulin," said Neil, indignantly, "and wouldna harm a flee."

Coquette put the glass to her lips, and then placed it on the table.

"Ye may drink it up, mem," said Neil. "Do ye ken that ye can drink sa goot whisky until ye stagger, and it will do ye no harm in sa morning? I do pelieve it is sa finest sing in the world's universe—a gran' good stagger as ye will go home in sa night."

"You have been in battle?" said Coquette, by way of changing the conversation.

"Oh, yes, mem," said Neil, looking desperately uncomfortable. "It wass—it wass—it wass in a war."

"Have you been in more than one war?" she asked.

"No, mem—yes, mem," stammered Neil, in great embarrassment, as he glanced to see that his tartan trousers were well shoved under the bed; "but it is of no matter how many wars. It will pe all over pefore you were porn—never mind about sa wars."

"I hear you were at Waterloo?" said Coquette, innocently.

The Pensioner jumped to his feet.

"Who wass it tellt you of Waterloo?" said he, in great indignation. "I never heard sa like! It wass a shame—and I would not take a hundred pounds and forget mysel' like sat. And you will be blaming us Hielanders for what we did—and we did a goot teal there—but there wass others too. There wass English there too. And the French—sey fought well, as every one o' us will tell ye; and I wouldna

sink too much o't ; for maype it isna true sat Napoleon died on sa island. Didna he come pack pefore ? ”

Having offered Coquette this grain of comfort, Neil hastily escaped from the subject by getting his violin and beginning to screw up the strings.

“ I have been learning a lot of your Scotch airs,” said Coquette, “ and I have become very fond of some of them—the sad ones especially. But I suppose you prefer the lively ones for the violin.”

“ I can play sem all every one together,” said Neil, proudly. “ I do not play sem well, but I know all our music—every one.”

“ You play a great deal ? ”

“ No,” said Neil, fondling his violin affectionately, “ I do not play sa fiddle much, but I like to be aye playing.”

There was a touch of pathos in the reply which did not escape the delicate perception of his guest. She looked at the old man, at his scanty grey hair and dazed eyes, and was glad that he had this constant companion to amuse and interest him. He did not like to play much—to make a labour of this recreation ; but he liked to have the whine of the tight strings always present to his ear.

He played her a selection of his best airs, with many an apology. He chatted about the tunes too, and told tales concerning them, until he was as familiar with the young lady as though he had known her a lifetime ; and she was laughing at his odd stories more than she had laughed for many a day. At last she said—

“ That ‘ Flowers of the Forest ’ is a beautiful air, but you want it harmonised. Will you come up to the Manse now, and I will play it for you ? I have been trying it much lately.”

So the Pensioner walked up to the Manse with them ; and soon found himself in Coquette’s parlour. His hostess remembered how she had been received, and went into the room adjoining for a second or two. When she returned there was a small bottle in her hand.

“ This is some French brandy which my old nurse gave me when I left, in case I should be ill at sea ; you see I have not even opened the bottle.”

The Whaup got a corkscrew and a glass, and soon had

half a tumblerful of the brandy to offer to Neil. The Pensioner looked at it, smelt it, said "Slainte!" and—to the horror of Coquette—gulped it down. The next moment his face was a mass of moving muscles—twisting and screwing into every expression of agony, while he gasped and choked, and could only say, "Water!—water!" But when the Whaup quickly poured him out a glass of water he regarded it at arm's length for a second, and then put it away.

"No," he said, with his face still screwed up to agony pitch, "I can thole."

Coquette did not understand what had happened; but when her cousin, with unbecoming frankness, explained to her that the Pensioner would rather "thole" (or suffer) the delicious torture in his throat than spoil it with water, she was nearly joining in the Whaup's impudent mirth.

But the brandy had no perceptible effect on Neil. He sat and listened sedately to the music she played; and it was only when his enthusiasm was touched that he broke out with some exclamation of delight. At length the old man left—the Whaup also going away to those exceptional studies which had been recently imposed on him as a condition of his remaining at Airlie.

Coquette sat alone at the piano. The grey day was darkening to the afternoon; and the rain had begun again its wearisome patter on the pane. She had French music before her—bright and laughing songs of the bygone and happy time—but she could not sing them. Almost unconsciously to herself, she followed the wanderings of her fancy in the dreamland of that old and plaintive music that she had recently discovered. Now it was "The Lowlands o' Holland"; again it was "Helen of Kirkconnell"; again it was "Logan Braes" that filled the room with its sadness; until she came back to "The Flowers of the Forest." She sang a verse of it—merely out of caprice, to see if she could master the pronunciation—and just as she had finished the door was opened, and Leezibeth stood there.

Coquette turned from the piano with a sigh: doubtless Leezibeth had appeared to prefer some complaint.

The woman came up to her and said—with the most painful shamefacedness clouding her look—

"Will ye sing that again, Miss, if it is no much trouble to ye? Maybe ye'll no ken that me and Andrew had a boy—a bit laddie that dee'd when he was but seven years auld—and—and he used to sing the 'Flowers o' the Forest' afore a' the ither songs, and ye sing it that fine that if it didna mak a body amaist like to greet——"

She never ended the sentence; but the girl sang the rest of the song; and the woman stood silent, with her eyes turned to the grey evening outside. And from that day Leezibeth was the slave of Coquette.

CHAPTER XIII.

A HOROSCOPE.

EVENTS were marching on at Airlie. Leezibeth came to Coquette, and said—

"Sir Peter and Lady Drum came back frae Edinburgh last night."

Coquette remained silent, and Leezibeth was astonished. Was it possible the girl had never heard of Sir Peter and Lady Drum?

"And I saw my lady this morning, and she is coming to see you this very afternoon," said Leezibeth, certain she had now effected a surprise.

"Who are they?" said Coquette. "Are they Scotch? I do not wish to see any more Scotch."

"Ma certes!" said Leezibeth, firing up suddenly; but presently she said, in a voice more gentle than Coquette had ever heard her use—"Ye'll maybe like the Scotch folk yet, Miss, when ye hae time to understand them; and Lady Drum is a grand woman—just an extraordinar' woman; and I told her a' about ye, Miss, and she was greatly interested, as I could see; and I made bold, Miss, to say that ye were a bit out o' sorts the now, and if my lady would but ask ye ower to Castle Cawmil, and let ye hae some company mair fitted to ye than us bodies about the Manse, it might cheer ye up a bit, and bring some colour to your cheek."

Coquette was really surprised now. Could it be Leezibeth, her enemy, who was speaking in this timidly solicitous fashion?

"It is very good of you——"

"Oh, we are no so bad as ye think us," said Leezibeth, plucking up courage. "And there is Scotch blood in your ain veins, Miss, as anybody can see—for the way ye sing they Scotch songs is just past believin'!"

From Coquette's sitting-room Leezibeth went straight to the Minister's study.

"I have come to speak to ye, sir, about Miss Cassilis."

"Dear me!" said the Minister impatiently, "I wish ye would let my niece alone, Leezibeth!"

But the Minister was no less astonished than Coquette had been when Leezibeth unfolded her tale, and made it apparent that she had come to intercede for the young French girl. Leezibeth stood at the door, and announced it as her decision that the Minister was bound to see to his niece's health and comfort more effectually than he had done. She spoke, indeed, as if she dared the Minister to refuse.

"And Sir Peter and my lady are coming here," continued Leezibeth, "for I met them as they were going over to Earlshope, and my lady spoke to me about Miss Cassilis, and will doubtless ask her to visit her. Not only maun she visit Castle Cawmil, but she maun stay there, sir, until the change has done the lassie good."

"What is the meaning of all this, Leezibeth?" said the Minister. "Has she bewitched you? Yesterday you would have said of her, 'She is a Samaritan, and hath a devil.' Now she has become your Benjamin, as it were. What will Andrew say?"

"Let the body mind his peas and his pittawties, and no interfere wi' me," said Leezibeth, with a touch of vigorous contempt.

Nevertheless, Leezibeth had a conversation with her husband very shortly after, and was a good deal more cautious in her speech than was customary with her. When Andrew came into the kitchen to have his dinner, she said—

"Andrew, my man, I'm thinkin' we diinna understand they Romans. Could ye but see the gude books that that lassie has wi' her, and see her read a bit o' one o' them every night and every mornin'—indeed, I'm thinkin', Andrew, the Romans maun be a kind o' religious folk, after a'."

Andrew said "Hm!" and went on with his broth.

"I wonder," continued Leezibeth, regarding her husband with some apprehension, "whether there is ony harm in the bit pictures she has. It's my opeenion she doesna worship them—as if they were a graven eemage—but has them, maybe, to jog her memory. Ye ken, Andrew, that there was a gran' difference atween the gowden calf that the children o' Israel made and the brazen serpent that the Lord commanded Moses to lift up in the wilderness."

"Whatever is the woman at?" muttered Andrew to himself, over his plate.

"The serpent was only a sign and a symbol, the forshadowin' o' what was to come; and surely Moses kenned what he was doin' and didna transgress. Now, Andrew, if the Romans—children o' wrath as they are—have a bit cross or a crucifix only as a sort o' remembrance, there is maybe no so muckle harm in it."

Andrew dropped his spoon into the broth, and sat bolt upright in his chair.

"Am I listenin' or dreamin', woman? What evil spirit is it that has put these things into your mouth, and linked ye wi' them whaus feet are set in hell? Are ye clean daunert, woman, that ye should come as an apologist for such folk, and tread the blood o' the covenant under foot? Nae wonder they have their crucifixes and their picturs—for it is a judgment upon them that they maun look upon Him whom they have pierced, and mourn their lost condition. And it is this lassie that has done it a', as I said frae the first. 'Twas a sad day for us that she came to Airlie; the Manse has never been itsel' since then. Yet never did I think to hear such words from a woman well brought up as ye have been; and it fears me to think what will be the end o't."

"Bless me!" said Leezibeth, testily, "I only asked for your opeenion."

"And my opeenion is," said Andrew, "that the time is coming when ye will see this woman in her true colours, and she will no longer be a snare to the feet o' them that would walk decently and uprightly. Ye hae been lead awa' by the tempter, Leezibeth, and the fair things o' the world hae been set before ye, and the kingdoms thereof, and your eyes

are blinded. But there will come a day—and that soon—when this Manse will see a change, and her that has entered it will be driven forth to seek another people. Dinna be beguiled in the meantime, Leezibeth. The end is comin', and her pictures and her crucifixes will not save her then."

"What do ye mean, Andrew?" said his wife, who was nearly in tears. "I am sure the lassie has done no wrong. I declare my heart feels for her when I see her sittin' by the window, a' by herself, looking out at naething, and a fair *wecht* o' weariness and patience on her face. If she had a mother, now, to look after her and speak to her——"

"And how long is it," said Andrew, "since ye hae taen this interest in her? How did she cast her wiles ower ye?"

Leezibeth did not answer. She was thinking of the vague and dreadful future which Andrew had been prophesying.

"Let her alone—leave her to hersel'," said Andrew. "I warn ye against this woman, Leezibeth, as I hae warned the Minister, though he would tak nae heed, and leaves her wi' a' her idolatrous implements free to work destruction in the midst o' a decent and God-fearing house. Yet in time this will be changed; and we will have to cast out the serpent. 'I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them.'"

"Who is that you are talking about? Is it my cousin?" said the Whaup, haughtily, as he suddenly stood before them. He had come into the kitchen in order to get some glue for a "dragon" which he was making for a younger brother, and had heard the latter end of Andrew's bitter forecast.

As for Leezibeth, she had turned aside in deep distress. Her newly awakened sympathy for the girl was rudely troubled by these sinister anticipations of her husband; and she did not know what to think of them. But Andrew, who had for the moment forgotten his broth, was looking up when he saw the Whaup unexpectedly appear. The old man's face, which was severe enough as he spoke, assumed a deep frown on his seeing his enemy; he was evidently annoyed at being "caught," and yet determined to brave it out.

"Why, you can't eat your dinner without stopping to

talk spite and scandal ! ” said the Whaup, with a curl of his lip. “ Can’t you leave that to women ? And a pretty Daniel you are, with your prophecies, and your judgments, and your warnings !—but if you will be a Daniel, by Jingo ! I’ll make this house worse to you than any den of lions ever you were in in your life ! ”

The Whaup went out and summoned a secret conclave of his brothers. The Vehmgericht met in the hay-loft.

CHAPTER XIV.

SIR PETER AND LADY DRUM.

COQUETTE, sitting quietly in the general parlour, the Minister being busy with his reading, heard voices in the hall, and one of them startled her. Indeed, she suddenly put her hand to her heart, having felt a quick flutter, as of pain ; and a tinge of colour came to her pale face. The next moment Leezibeth announced Sir Peter and Lady Drum, and Lord Earlshope ; and these three entered the room.

Sir Peter was a short, stout, rosy-cheeked, and fair-haired man, who wore a suit of light grey, and had a big diamond ring on his finger. There was a pleasant expression in his face ; a frolicsome look in his eyes ; and his talk, which was as often as not a monologue addressed to himself, was interrupted by his humming snatches of gay airs, addressed to the window, or the fireplace, or the picture at which he chanced to be looking. On this occasion, however, he had duties to perform ; he went briskly forward to shake hands with the Minister ; he was introduced to Coquette ; and then, and with some merry little remark, he led forward his wife to the young girl.

Coquette found herself confronted by a most striking-looking woman—one who might have sat for a picture of a great lady of the last century. Lady Drum was a tall, elderly, upright person, with a keen face which was yet kindly in the severity of its features, and with a fine head of grey hair, elaborately arranged. Lady Drum was widely known in the neighbourhood for her inflexible judgments on people’s conduct, her generous but scrupu-

lously calculated aid to all who were in need, and her skill in medicine, which she loved to practise ; and it was a popular mystery how this stately and imposing lady could have married the gay little gentleman who was now her husband. Yet they agreed remarkably well, and seemed to have a mutual esteem for each other. She bore with great equanimity his perpetual jokes, his ceaseless and rambling talk, his irrelevant tunes and airs ; while he was fond to address her as his “jewel,” and declare that she had saved his life twenty times with her physic. Of all the families in the county the Drums were the only people whom Lord Earlshope was ever known to visit ; and his regard and liking for the grave and noble-looking lady of Castle Cawmil had even led him to permit himself to be dosed and doctored upon occasions. Sometimes they corresponded ; and the contents of Lady Drum’s letters chiefly consisted in motherly advice about the use of flannel in spring time, and the great virtues of some new herb she had discovered. As for Sir Peter, Earlshope seldom saw him when he visited Castle Cawmil. Sir Peter was anywhere—everywhere—but in his own house. He flitted about the country, enjoying himself wherever he went ; for the number of his friends was legion ; while Lady Drum attended to her poultry-yard and her patients at home.

Coquette found fixed upon her a pair of severe and scrutinising eyes ; but there was something in the appearance of the tall, grey-haired woman which she could not help admiring and even liking. When she spoke—which she did in a grave and deliberate fashion, with a considerably marked Scotch accent—her voice had all the softness which her features lacked.

“I hope you will find Airlie a pleasant place,” said Lady Drum, still retaining Coquette’s hand.

“Dull—dull—dull,” said Sir Peter, looking out of the window, and humming to himself. “Very dull—very dull—very dull. Ha, ha ! Hm, hm ! Ha, ha !”

“And we shall hope to see you often at Castle Cawmil,” continued Lady Drum.

“I thank you,” said Coquette, simply, but making no promise.

Lady Drum at once turned to the Minister.

"Your housekeeper has been telling me that your niece is very much in want of a change. I can see it. The wet weather has kept her indoors. She wants to be sent out into the air, with companions and amusement; and I would even recommend a little tansy or, perhaps, gentian root. If she were with me for a week or two I might try the Caribbean cinchona, which has proved an excellent tonic within my own experience; but as for horse-chestnut bark, which some prefer to use, I do not hold wi' that in any case. Lord Earlshope will tell ye, Mr. Cassilis, that the Caribbean cinchona——"

"Did me a world of good," said Lord Earlshope. "Indeed I was quite ashamed to get well so rapidly, and deprive my amiable physician of the chance of watching the effects of her cure. In fact, I got so ridiculously well that I had no occasion to drink any of the coltsfoot wine that Lady Drum was good enough to send me. Shall I transfer it to you, Miss Cassilis, when you become one of Lady Drum's patients?"

"I will take it—if it is nice," said Coquette.

Lady Drum did not like this way of treating the subject, especially as her husband was moving about the room from place to place, and humming a series of reflections on physic generally, which interfered with the dignity of the situation.

"Fine thing, physic—grand thing, physic—hm! hm!—old woman comes and gets her physic, and sixpence—hm, ha!—drinks the sixpence, and flings away the physic—with a 'God bless all doctors—if possible.' Hm, hm! hm, hm! ha, ha! Capital garden that of yours, Mr. Cassilis—capital—too much like a wilderness, perhaps. Got the old pony in the stables yet—old Bess with the swallow-tail? Remember how the Hielandman thought the flicht o' a swallow was like a squint lum?"

"What is that?" said Earlshope.

"Untranslatable—untranslatable," carolled Sir Peter. "'Bekass it wass a crookit flue.' More untranslatable still, isn't it? We must be going, my lady."

But my lady had got into a very confidential chat with Coquette, and had even aired a few French phrases to show that she had been used to polite accomplishments in her

youth. She had been to Paris, also ; had seen the *Place de la Bastille* ; and considered herself profound in the history of the capital. Their talk, nevertheless, was chiefly of *Airlie*, and of *Coquette's* experiences there.

"I did like the place better when I came here," said the girl. "Much better. Yet, it is pretty, you know—when there is sun, and it is not cold. It is always the same thing at *Airlie*—the same place, the same people, the same things to do each day. That is tiresome when one is indoors in the rain—when one is out in good days there is variety. If you will let me visit you, I shall be joyous—joyful—no, I mean I shall be glad to visit you and see you. And will you come to *Airlie* often ? I have no lady-friend in this country, you know—only my uncle and the boys—and if you will be so kind to come and see me, it will be a great pleasure to me."

"But I am an old woman," said *Lady Drum*. "I should be a poor companion for you."

"But I have always lived with old people," said *Coquette*, somewhat too bluntly ; "I do like old people better than young."

Lady Drum was puzzled. Why did this young creature talk so sadly, and show none of the liveliness and hope natural to her age ? Surely, with her graceful and well-formed figure, her clear dark eyes, and the healthy red of her lips that were obviously meant to laugh, she ought to have plenty of spirit and life ? *Lady Drum* had never seen the true *Coquette*—the *Coquette* to whom every day was a holiday, and every incident in it a glad experience ; but she half divined that the pale, pretty, dark-eyed girl who sat beside her, and who had an ease of manner which was the perfection of simplicity, was not strung up to her natural pitch of health and enjoyment. *Lady Drum* had never heard *Coquette* laugh in the open air, or sing to herself in the garden ; but she had a suspicion that the beauty of the girl's face was paler than it ought to be.

"Quassia !" said *Lady Drum* suddenly, and *Coquette* looked startled ; but presently the other said—"No. We must try something else first. *Castle Cawmil* would be tiresome just now, with an old woman like me in it. By and by, my lassie, you must come and see me when I have

got together some young folks ; and we shall have half the gentlemen in Ayrshire fighting for the first quadrille."

"Is there dancing at your house ?" said Coquette, with interest.

"Dancing ! Yes, as much dancing as young lassoeks like you should have—wha will not be persuaded to take any other sort o' exercise."

"I was told it was evil here," said Coquette, remembering certain of Leezibeth's orations.

"Evil ! evil !" said Lady Drum. "If there was much evil in it, it wouldna set its foot within my doors. But then, ye see, Miss Cassilis, this is a minister's house, and a minister must be discreet—no to give offence, as it were."

She turned to Lord Earlshope, who had been conversing with the Minister. "Lord Earlshope, do ye mind that you pressed me to make use of your yacht when occasion suited ?"

"Certainly I do," said Earlshope. "She is quite at your service—always ; and just at present she is in capital cruising order. Do you propose to take Miss Cassilis for a run up some of the lochs ?"

"Indeed, it was the very thing I was thinking of," said Lady Drum.

"Then you have only to drive to Ardrossan any day you choose, and give Maxwell his sailing orders. He is a steady old fellow, and will take every care of you."

Coquette listened mutely, with her eyes fixed on the ground. Lord Earlshope, then, proposed that she and Lady Drum should go by themselves ?—she did not think it very civil.

"I had some notion of asking Mr. Cassilis to form a party and go for a short cruise, but I dismissed it as chimerical. Perhaps you will be more successful if you try."

"Now tell me," said Lady Drum, with a business-like air, "how many you can take on board."

"Why, half the population of Airlie, or thereabouts. But there is one very grand state-room which you ladies could share between you ; and as for your gentlemen friends, you might ask as many as had been accustomed to the exigencies of yachts—myself among the number, I hope. As for Sir Peter——"

"No, no, no!" cried Sir Peter, gaily. "No yachting for me—sleeping in a hole—washing out of a tea-cup—wet to the skin all day—ha, ha! hm, hm! ha, ha! No yachting for me—off to Peebles on Tuesday—then back to Edinburgh the week after—my lady may go if she likes."

"Mr. Cassilis, may we reckon on you?" said Lady Drum, severely ignoring her husband's volatility. "Your niece demands some change of the kind; and I have entered into a contract long ago with Lord Earlschope about the yacht."

"You need not be frightened by what Sir Peter says," observed Lord Earlschope, with a smile. "On board a sixty-ton yacht you are not put to such dreadful inconveniences. Shall I add my entreaties to those of Lady Drum? If you could get away from your duties for a week or two, it would be a pleasant holiday at this season; and, if you like, I will go with you for a few days, to see you all comfortably settled."

There was positively a blush on the pale grey face of the Minister. The notion of taking a holiday for the mere purpose of pleasure was quite startling to him—had, in fact, something uncanny about it. If the proposal, indeed, had not been made in the first instance by Lady Drum—whose decision as to matters of propriety was law throughout the district—he would not even have considered it for a moment.

"I cannot give an answer out-of-hand," he said, gravely, and yet with some hesitation. "Doubtless it is a tempting and a kind offer; but there are other obligations binding on us than our own wishes——"

"Now, Mr. Cassilis," said Lady Drum, "have you not mentioned to me that you greatly hoped for some opportunity of giving young Mr. M'Alister your pulpit for the day—an honour that he has fairly set his heart on?"

"But I should like to be present to witness his trial," said the Minister, fighting against himself.

"Ye may trust him—ye may trust him," said Lady Drum, decisively. "He is as safe as an auld horse with blinders on. No fear o' him alarming the congregation wi' new doctrine—he hasna spunk enough to be dangerous."

This somewhat doubtful testimony to the intellectual

qualifications of the young man carried some weight, evidently, and Mr. Cassilis then turned to his niece.

"Catherine," said he, solemnly, "you have heard Lady Drum's proposal—would it please you to go?"

"Oh, very much," said Coquette, "if—if my cousin could also go."

The Minister stared: how had the Whaup come to be of such consequence?

"Do you mean my friend Tom?" said Lord Earlishope. "Why, of course he can go. There is nothing to hinder him."

Coquette was very grateful; and though she did not put her gratitude into words, there was a brighter look on her face than had been there for many a day. The Minister said he would consider the matter; and—if he saw that his duties to his parishioners would not suffer—he hoped to be able to take his niece on this voyage of health.

When the visitors had gone, Coquette went outside to look for the Whaup. She found him in the garden—inclined to resume his attitude of hostility on account of this appearance of Earlishope at the Manse.

"Tom," she said, "I do wish to speak to you—to ask why you avoid me—when you were my good companion for a long time. Why should we quarrel?"

"Quarrel!" said the Whaup—as if he scorned the idea of his bothering himself to quarrel with anybody—"I haven't quarrelled; I haven't time to quarrel. But I suppose you are come to be penitent and all that; and probably you will cry. I don't like to see you cry; so I'll make friends at once if you like."

"Is that how you do make friends in Scotland?" said Coquette, with a laugh in her eyes,—“standing a yard off—looking fierce—and speaking harsh."

"Oh, I will kiss you, if you like," said the Whaup, bluntly, and he advanced for that purpose.

"No," said Coquette, with the least change of manner—and yet that delicate alteration in her tone and look protected her as though with a wall of iron. "I did not ask you. But I have something to say of very much importance—oh! such great importance! And I wish you to be kind as you once were—but I am afraid on this day.

It is too cold—too dull. On a clear day you would say yes."

"Don't talk so much, but tell me what it is," said the Whaup. He was warding off, rudely, the insidious attacks of his too pretty cousin.

"It is proposed we all go with Lord Earlshope's yacht on a long voyage round the Islands—your papa and Lady Drum, and me, too ; and it depends if you will go that I will go."

"I go !" said the Whaup, with a burst of laughter. "In Earlshope's yacht ! You must be mad !"

"If you do not go, I will not go," said Coquette, simply.

"Perhaps it is better you shouldn't go," said the Whaup.

"Perhaps it is," said Coquette, turning away towards the house.

The Whaup looked after her for a moment ; then he followed her.

"Look here—what do you want to go for ? " he asked.

"I thought it would be pleasurable—the amusement, the going away from this place a few days—the whole of us together. But I am not anxious—I can stay at home."

"Why can't you go without me ? " said he.

"I wanted you for a companion," said Coquette, looking down. "There will be nobody but your papa and Lady Drum—Lord Earlshope only comes for a day or two, to see us off."

He looked at her downcast face in a scrutinising way—he was not sure about her.

"You know, I don't believe in you as I did at one time. People who deceive you once will deceive you again," he said.

She looked up with an angry glance ; and bitter tears sprang to her eyes.

"How can you say that ? " she said, indignantly. "You are too hard—you have no mercy—you expect everyone to be as rude as yourself. If you do not believe me, it is no matter to me ; I can believe myself—that is enough."

With these words, she was again turning proudly away, when he caught her by the hand and stopped her.

"You are a very peculiar young woman," he said. "You are always firing off somehow or other—always very delighted or else very miserable. Why don't you take things coolly, as

I do? I don't say you're very bad because you went in for little trifling useless bits of deceit. I suppose every woman does that—it's their nature, and it's no use grumbling. If you had any sense, you'd dry your eyes, get something on your head, and come and see us dig up a bees' nest that I have found."

"Yes, I will do that," she said, adding timidly—"and about the yacht—I am not to go?"

He looked in her eyes just then; and, oddly enough, that glance somehow made him aware that he was holding her hand—a little, white hand, that had a couple of slender rings on one of the fingers. He dropped the hand at once; was uncomfortable and shy for a moment; and then said desperately, "Yes, I will go."

There was a flush of colour and gladness passed over the pale face; and she lifted his hand suddenly and pressed it to her lips. Then she ran into the house, and presently reappeared with her hat and some loose white thing that she hurriedly flung round her neck. Her eyes were so bright and joyous that the Whaup looked at her with amazement.

In a secret corner the Whaup found his brothers, armed with large boughs. At once all set out for the moor where the bees' nest had been discovered; and the Whaup revealed to Coquette that his object in storming the nest was not merely to secure the little underground nuts of honey. A deed of vengeance had to be accomplished, and the captured bees were to aid in the task.

Now, Sir Peter and Lady Drum were returning to Earls-hope for luncheon; but they went out of their way to call at a certain farm, the dairy-maid there being under her ladyship's treatment. It was when they had resumed their route, and were driving along the high moorland road, that they chanced to see in the distance a small procession of figures, carrying branches of trees.

"Why yonder is Coquette running and laughing!" said Lord Earls-hope.

"Running and laughing?" said Lady Drum. "Has that dark-eyed little witch been cheating me?"

CHAPTER XV.

A DANGEROUS ADVENTURE.

"WHAT is the matter with you?" said the Whaup to Coquette. "For a few minutes you are alive, and in the world; and the next minute you are staring over there at the sea, as if you could look through the Arran hills, and find something miles and miles away on the other side."

Coquette started, and recalled herself; but there was no tinge of embarrassment on the pale, clear, foreign face. She said—

"I was thinking whether your papa would let us go with Lady Drum."

"Then he has not promised to go?" said the Whaup sharply.

The dark eyes of Coquette began to look afraid.

"It is a strange thing," said the Whaup, "that women will not tell you all the truth at once. They must keep back things, and make mysteries, and try to deceive you. Why didn't you say to me—'There is a talk of our going a trip in Earlshope's yacht. Will you come, if we are allowed to go?'—instead of hinting that you were all fixed on going, and I might as well join you? Well, there, I am not going to say another word. You can't help it. You are only a woman."

"And you are only a boy," she said, looking up to the tall, handsome lad beside her,—“very kind, and very generous, and very stupid."

"I am older than you, at least," said the Whaup, who did not like being called a boy. "And, if it was any use, I'd give you the advice to drop these little tricks, and be honest."

"If my honesty were equal to your rudeness, I should please you," said Coquette, with a smile. She was disinclined just then to take umbrage.

"It will be a bold thing for my father to go away anywhere in the company of Lord Earlshope," observed the Whaup. "It will be only his regard for your health that will force him."

"Why?" said Coquette, with a touch of asperity.

"Well, you know the reputation he has in the parish," remarked the Whaup, coolly. "Perhaps everybody is wrong; but, at all events, Earlishope gives them every reason to think ill of him. He never comes to church; he walks about on Sundays with his dogs; or else he reads novels, and smokes cigars. If I go with you, it is not to be friends with him; it is to protect you. Do you know, either he is mad or one of these novels has turned his head; for he has got a place built at the end of the grounds like a wizard's cave, with trickling water running over a lot of rocks; and he sits there at night to read, and in the rocks he has blue lights, that make the place look as if it was haunted."

"That is stuff and humbug," said Coquette.

"What did you say?"

"I do mean it is nonsense, if that is better. It is an old woman's story of the village—it is a fable—it is foolish."

"Very well, very well," said the Whaup. "But if you have the courage to slip out of the house to-night when it is dark, and run all the way there, I will take you in by an opening that I know, and show you the place."

"Suppose he were there?" said Coquette.

"No fear. The nights are getting too cold. Will you go?"

"Perhaps," said Coquette.

By this time they had arrived at the spot of the moor where the Whaup had discovered the bees' nest. He pointed out to his companion a small hole in a piece of mossy ground which was not covered by the heather; and as she looked at it, a large humble-bee came crawling out, paused for a second, and then flew away with a low buzzing noise into the distance. The Whaup threw off his jacket, and took his spade in hand.

"Here," said he to Coquette, "protect yourself with this branch. Knock them down when they come near you."

"Why?" she said. "They will not harm me—I am not harming them."

"That may be the case wi' bees in France," observed the Whaup, disdainfully, "where they've got fine manners; but ye'll find Scotch bees are different."

So he ordered one of the boys to stand by Coquette and beat down any bees that might come her way; threatening

him with pains and penalties dire if one should touch her. Then he struck the spade into the ground near the entrance to the nest, and raised a large "divot." The channel to the subterranean caves was now laid bare; and one or two bees that had been coming up were seen extricating themselves from the loose earth. These Dougal straightway laid hold of, by means of his handkerchief, and popped them into a large paper bag which he held.

"What for you put them in a bag?" said Coquette; at which all the boys burst out laughing. But they did not tell her the secret.

The excitement of this work of destruction now began. Out came the bees in dozens, buzzing up from the ruddy earth only to be struck down by great branches of alder borne by the boys; while the intrepid Dougal, with his face and hands quite unguarded, stood over the hole, and picked up whichever of them looked only stunned. It was a dangerous occupation; for those inside the bag which had partially recovered began to hum their discontent, and tried to escape by the small opening which admitted their companions in misfortune. Sometimes, indeed, the other boys assisted, although they had sufficient occupation for themselves in beating back the winged host that flew round and round their ears.

Suddenly Wattie uttered a loud shriek, and set off running as hard as he could. His companions perceived to their dismay that about twenty or thirty bees had clustered round his head, and were now following him, and hovering over him as he ran.

"He's got the queen bee on his bonnet," said the Whaup. "Throw down your bonnet—ye idiot!—throw down your bonnet!"

Wattie was still within hearing, and had sufficient nerve left him to do as he was bid. He snatched at his cap, pitched it on the heather, and again made off; but it was soon apparent that he was out of danger. The bees had lit upon the cap; and from a safe distance he stood and regarded it with rather a rueful countenance.

The issue of bees had ceased. The boys laid down their branches, and began to dig out with their fingers, from among the red and sandy earth, the small brown combs of

honey, which were speedily transferred, sand and all, to their mouth. The Whaup, of course, would not condescend to such vulgar and childish practices ; but he produced a pen-knife, and extracted some honey from one of the combs, which Coquette was pleased to taste.

"What for you have bees in the bag?" said Coquette, as they prepared to go home—a simultaneous charge of branches having cleared Wattie's cap.

"I told you," said the Whaup, "there was a deed of vengeance to be done. In the stable there is a bag of corn, which Andrew opens twice a day to get some for the pony. We are going to put the bees in the bag—I suppose there's near a hundred of them. When Andrew plunges his hand into the bag——"

"O you wicked boy!" cried Coquette.

"You are the cause of it," said the Whaup.

"I?"

"I heard him calling ye all sorts o' names out of the Bible—Satan quoting Scripture, you see—and I have warned him before ; and now he'll get it."

"The bees, they will kill him," said Coquette.

"So much the better," retorted the Whaup ; "he is a nuisance."

"But what is that on your hand—that is a sting, is it not?" she said, looking at a considerable swelling, which was visible on the Whaup's forefinger.

"Oh, one sting is nothing," he said, carelessly, "unless it's a wasp or a hornet. Did you ever burn out a nest of hornets? If you haven't, don't try."

"No," said Coquette, simply, "I'm not such a gowk."

"Well, that is pretty English!" observed the Whaup, with a stare.

"Isn't it right? I did hear you say it yesterday," remarked Coquette, without any notion that she was turning the tables on her critic.

So they drew near home again ; and the Whaup fancied a shade came over his companion's face as they approached the Manse. Perhaps it was the dull, grey day, which made the old-fashioned little place look dull and solitary—that made the moor look unusually bleak, and the long stretch of country sombre and sad.

"I hope you are not tired," said the Whaup.

"Tired? No," she said, with a certain languor. "Do you think your papa will take us away from here for a little while?"

"How you harp on that yacht!" rejoined the Whaup, good-naturedly. "I must go and persuade my father on your behalf, I think."

"Will you do that?" she said, with eagerness.

"Yes," he said, "and just now. Isn't he there in the garden? I hear him talking. Oh, it is the Schoolmaster, who is delivering a lecture. Now, I will wager he is talking about you."

"About me?"

"Yes; don't you know you are a dangerous character to the whole village?"

"I should like to know what he says about me," said Coquette, proudly, advancing towards the wall which surrounded the garden.

"But not that way," said the Whaup, taking her hand and leading her off. "If you wish to know, you mustn't hide and listen—although I suppose that is a woman's way. You go into the Manse—I will go into the garden and bring you word what the new ground of complaint is."

Leaving Coquette, therefore, the Whaup went round the house, and boldly walked up to the place where Mr. Gillespie and the Minister stood together.

"It is Earlshope who is catching it this time," said the Whaup to himself, overhearing the name.

His father looked with some surprise on the approach of his eldest son—who had rather a pugnacious look on his face, by the way; but the Schoolmaster was too intent upon his choice phrases to heed.

"... than which, sir, nothing could be more deplorable, or mortifying, as I may say," observed Mr. Gillespie. "But I would give every man the due of his actions; for, although works are not in themselves saving, they may be a sign—or, as some would term it, a symptom—of the presence o' grace, even among the Gentiles who know not the law, yet do the things that are written or inscribed in the law."

"Yes, yes, Mr. Gillespie!" said the Minister, with an

impatient twitch at his bunch of seals : “ but ye said ye had come to tell me——”

“ Yes, sir, to inform ye of a circumstance which deserves, or is entitled to, some remark. I have been made the means—or, I may say, the humble instrument—of conveying to the people of this parish no less a sum than one hundred pounds sterling, to be expended, sir, as those who have authority among us may direct, for the good—or benefit—of such as are—such as are—such as are, in fact, here. Ware it—or as I ought to say—expend it as we best may on the educational or worldly wants of the parish, it is all the same ; and while I would observe, sir, that the money cannot heighten in value the services which you give—or rather render to this parish—it being your duty, as I may express it, to expound the prophecies and dig up spiritual gold and silver for them that are of Zion, I would take your advice wi’ all humility as to how this sum is to be granted to, or bestowed upon, the parish.”

Mr. Gillespie paused, with the air of a man who had been up to the occasion. He raised his large spectacles towards the Minister’s face, and proudly awaited the reply.

“ Where got ye this money ? ” said the Minister.

“ Sir, from Lord Earlshope—some three days ago, with a letter dated from some place in the north, in which his lordship was pleased to say that it was but a whim of his. A noble and a praiseworthy whim, said I to Mrs. Gillespie, on receiving the money, for his lordship, according to general report, or, as I might say, rumour, is a poor man for one in his station ; and as I would argue from facts, Mr. Cassilis, rather than from idle hearsay, I am bold to observe that there are in this very parish those who would look black at his Lordship, and yet no bestow a bawbee on the relief o’ the poor. I wouldna, sir, cast—or, in other words, fling—the first stone ; and if some would do as they see Lord Earlshope do, I am thinking, sir, they would not—they would not do—as—as, in fact, they do do.”

Feeling that his eloquence was beginning to halt, the Schoolmaster pulled out the identical letter and cheque which had effected so extraordinary a change in his sentiments towards the owner of Earlshope. These he handed to Mr. Cassilis, who took them and scanned them with equal

surprise and pleasure. The Minister even hinted that since his lordship was so well-disposed to the parish, and apparently inclined to make up for past forgetfulness, it would be unbecoming of the parish not to meet his advances in a similar friendly spirit.

"Precisely and exactly as I observed to Mrs. Gillespie this morning, sir, not ten minutes—nay, when I recollect, not above five minutes—indeed, I am sure three minutes could not have elapsed—after the reading of the letter, or communication I might call it, seeing what it holds. And Mrs. Gillespie, sir, made an observation couched in homely phrase—yet pertaining, or, as I might say, bearing upon this point. She remarked that the test of a man's fair words was when he put his hand in his pocket."

"It is sometimes so," said the Minister; adding, with a sly glance at the Schoolmaster, "perhaps, after all, Mr. Gillespie, when my parishioners hear of Lord Earlishope's generosity, they will not wonder at my receiving him at the Manse, nor yet will they object to his speaking to my niece."

The Schoolmaster looked rather uncomfortable; and the Whaup, behind his back, performed some derisive and delighted antics of a vulgar nature.

"I maun e'en take a man as I find him, Mr. Cassilis," said the Schoolmaster, forgetting his English in the warmth of his self-defence. "If he alters for the better, what for should I stick to my old opinion, like a flee to the wa'?"

"Certainly, certainly," said the Minister; "but sometimes it is our judgment that is mistaken in the first case, and it behoves us to be cautious and charitable."

"No man ever accused me o' being without charity, in moderation—in moderation," said the Schoolmaster, with his spectacles glaring fiercely. "But I am no for that charity that lets ye be led by the nose. I have my own opeenions—charity is a good thing—a very good thing—but it needna make a fool o' ye, and make people believe that ye are as blind as Eli. No, sir, wi' due deference to you, I still consider Lord Earlishope to be——"

In his excitement the Schoolmaster had unconsciously unfolded the cheque he held in his hands; and he now suddenly found himself looking at it. He did not finish the sentence. He waved his hand, as though to say—"These

are bygones ; I was right, but it is no matter ; and Lord Earlshope has mended."

"And what do ye propose to do with the money?—not that there will be any difficulty in finding suitable directions," said the Minister.

"That," replied the Schoolmaster, with grave importance, "is a matter for serious—and, I may add, patient—consideration, in which, sir, I would earnestly desire your assistance and advice. In the meantime, it is but fitting (such is my humble opinion) that acknowledgment of his lordship's bounty should be made—and that not in a formal manner, but in a friendly—a conciliatory manner, as I may say, in which I will show his lordship that we of this parish recognise, appreciate, and commend these approaches—or overtures they might, I think, be properly called, on his part ; and who knows, sir, but that encouragement of this kind might have the effect of stimulating or exciting his lordship to renew—I may say, in short, to repeat—these attentions of a generous nature——"

Mr. Gillespie stopped here, not sure whether he had got to the end of his sentence or not. He then continued—

"I hope, sir, in your capacity of private friend of the young nobleman, and as public and spiritual overseer of this parish, you will convey to him our sense of what he has done ; and if you could bring him and the parish closer together——"

"At this present moment, on the contrary," said the Minister, with a hesitating smile, "Lord Earlshope proposes to carry me away from the parish. I have received an invite, with some members of my household, to go on a small voyage in his lordship's yacht, Lady Drum being the instigator of the project, as I believe."

The spectacles of the Schoolmaster seemed to wax bigger.

"How do you think the parish would receive the proposal?" asked the Minister, rather timidly.

"I will make it my business to ascertain," replied the Schoolmaster, with an air of authority. "Nay, further, Mr. Cassilis, I will even go the length of advising your parishioners to acquiesce. Why, sir, it is their duty. Lord Earlshope, Mr. Cassilis, is a man to be encouraged—he *must* be encouraged."

This was all that was wanted to confirm the Minister's

decision. He had for some time back seen fit to abandon the suspicions that had been suggested by his meeting Lord Earlshope and Coquette on the moor; and the only question now was whether Coquette's health would be greatly benefited by his accepting the invitation.

The Whaup made off at this moment, and went to Coquette.

"You owe Gillespie a good turn for once," said he to her. "The old fool has persuaded my father to go."

CHAPTER XVI.

COQUETTE LEAVES AIRLIE.

How brightly shone the sun on the welcome morning of their departure!—when Coquette, as she looked out to catch a glimpse of the fair blue sea and the distant hills of Arran, could scarce take time to curb the wildness of her dark hair. Already the open window let her drink in the fresh morning breeze; she felt the warmth of the sun on her cheek. Generally, at her toilette, she sang careless snatches of French songs, or even endeavoured to imitate the Whaup's whistling of a Highland reel; but on this morning she was far too excited for any such amusements. The face that had been getting tired and wan of late was now flushed with happiness; and when at last she came running down-stairs, and out into the garden—her white dress fluttering in the sun, and her hair getting rather the better of the dark blue band interwoven with it—she fairly overwhelmed the boys with her demonstrations of affection and kindness.

The Whaup's brothers were practical young persons; and, though they still regarded this foreigner and Catholic as a dangerous companion—as somebody who had to be approached with caution—they had discovered, at an early period, that certain gold coins of French origin could be transformed at Ardrossan into an honest and respectable mintage. The amount of pocket-money which the reckless young woman lavished upon her cousins (excepting the Whaup, of course,) was appalling; nor could the observant Leezibeth make out whence came all the new pocket-knives, tools, and similar boyish luxuries which she discovered about

the house. The boys themselves had an uneasy impression that there was something desperately wicked in having so much money ; and, indeed, had many private conversations among themselves about the specious arguments with which they might cheat the devil if he happened to put in a claim for them, on account of extravagance.

"You must all be very good till I come back," she said, now, "for I am going to bring you all presents. I will buy you—what shall I buy you?"

The boys began to laugh, but rather in a disappointed way.

"There is but wan thing ye'll get to buy in the Hielands," said Dougal, "and that's herrin'."

"And too good for you," said the Whaup, coming up, "you greedy young pigs. If I hear you bargaining about presents any more I'll present ye with a bottle o' hazel oil, if ye ken what that is. Come along, Miss Coquette, and get your breakfast, and then show me what luggage you have. I dare say it's twice as big as I can allow."

"You allow? Are you the master of the luggage?"

"I am—as you'll find out," said he. "I have just taken half the pile of things that Leczibeth had packed up for my father and shunted them into a drawer. We don't mean to go to the Sandwich Islands."

"Do we go to the Sandwich Islands?" said Coquette, simply.

"I said we don't mean to go there," repeated the Whaup, with asperity ; "but I suppose you don't know where that is—the French are so precious ignorant."

"Worse luck," said Coquette, with an expression of sincere penitence which made the Whaup burst out laughing.

At length, some two hours afterwards, Coquette found herself seated in the little dog-cart which had brought her to Airlie. A sour man was Andrew Bogue that day ; and sourer was he now. Nor word nor syllable would he utter ; and the more vivacious and talkative Coquette became—speaking to her uncle, who sat behind, the Whaup having been sent off on foot—the deeper and sterner became the gloom of his face. Perhaps he was none the less disposed to predict evil of this appalling departure from the sober and respectable routine of the Manse, because of a severe

encounter he had had with Leezibeth that morning. He saw that Leezibeth had now gone wholly over to the enemy.

When they reached the harbour and saw the shapely vessel lying out at anchor, with her sails shining in the sun, they perceived that both the Whaup and Lady Drum had gone on board. Presently, the gig was put off from the yacht, and in a few minutes Coquette and her uncle were being pulled out by the four blue-jackets. Lord Earlshope was at the gangway to receive them.

"Why does he not wear a sailor's uniform?" said Coquette to Mr. Cassilis, as they drew near. "He does not seem to care about anything."

When they stepped on board—and Coquette had looked round with wonder on the whiteness of the deck, and the scrupulous neatness everywhere visible—Lady Drum came forward, and kissed her, and said,

"My dear child, I hope you know about yachts, for I don't, and I feel most uncomfortably in the way of everybody."

"Yes, I know a little," said Coquette.

"Why, all you have to do," said Lord Earlshope, coming forward, "is to sit in the cockpit there—an innovation I introduced for the very purpose of getting ladies out of the way during a race. You need have no fear of getting hit on the head by the boom, or of being washed overboard either; and if a wave *should* come over the stern——"

"I hope there will be nothing of the kind," said Lady Drum, looking indignantly out towards the sea.

The prospect there was sufficiently reassuring. There was a light breeze from the south-west which was just enough to ruffle the water and make it of a darker blue. Overhead the sky was clear and calm; and the peaks of Arran were faint and aerial in the mid-day mist. Everything promised a pleasant run up to Loch Fyne, if only the wind would last.

While the men were getting the vessel under weigh, Lord Earlshope's visitors went down below; and if Coquette had been pleased with the prettiness of the yacht above, she was now charmed with the decorations of the state-rooms and saloon. The transparent flowers painted on the skylights—the ornamentation and gilding of what she profanely called the walls—the innumerable little arrangements for comfort

—all these were matter for praise ; but the climax of her delight was found in a small harmonium which was placed in the saloon.

“I should have got a piano for you,” said Lord Earlshope—making no secret of his having studied her pleasure in the matter—“but they don’t stand the sea so well. Now, Lady Drum, will you take Miss Cassilis into your cabin ; and when you have made yourselves thoroughly at home—and got out some wrappers for the sea breezes, you know—you will find luncheon awaiting you here. Mr. Cassilis, you will take a glass of sherry, won’t you ? You will always find it *there*. Mr. Tom, do you shoot ?”

“I should think so !” said the Whaup, who had apparently forgotten his sentiments of antagonism to Lord Earlshope.

“I thought you would. You will find my breech-loader in your cabin ; and the steward will give you cartridges if you ask him. Now I must go on deck.”

“I never thought he had so much snap in him,” said the Whaup familiarly to his father.

“So much what ?” said the Minister, severely.

“Why, life—energy. I thought he was rather a muff—with his white fingers, and his lazy lounge and that. But he’s not as bad a fellow as people say.”

“Lord Earlshope would be pleased to know that you approve of him,” said his father ; but the Whaup lost the sarcasm, for he had already run up the companion, to see what was going on above. His father, following, found that the Whaup had clambered half-way up the ratlines, to get a view of the surrounding scenery as the yacht stood out to sea.

When, some little time thereafter, the steward’s bell called upon Lady Drum and Coquette to come forth from their cabin, the latter was heard to say—

“Why don’t we start, then ? I do not like to remain in harbour.”

But the moment she entered the saloon and saw the table slightly heeling over, she said—

“We are at sea ?”

“Yes,” said Lord Earlshope ; “and missing a pretty part of the coast. So you ought to hasten your luncheon.”

"But what is the matter with the table?" said Lady Drum, making an effort to put it at right angles to herself. Coquette screamed, and caught her hand.

"If you put it straight," said Lord Earlshope, laughing, "you will see everything fly to the ground." It was days, indeed, before Lady Drum could believe that this tumbling table was secure; and many a time she had to check herself from instinctively "putting it straight."

Pleasant, indeed, on that bright and quiet afternoon was their run up the broad channel between Bute and Arran. Far away the coast of Ayrshire, which they had left, became paler and more pale; while on before them successive bays opened out, with silent hills overlooking them, and here and there the white glimmer of a sea bird in their shadows. Down in the south, the mountains that rise from the lonely Loch Ranza had caught some clouds about their peaks, and were dark and sombre, as the mountains of Arran generally are; but all in front of them—the smooth slopes of Bute and Inch Marnoch, the craggy wonders of the Kyles, the still shores of Cowal and Cantire—lay steeped in a soft autumnal haze, with the rich colours of heather and fern only half glimmering through the silver veil. It was like a voyage into dreamland—so beautiful was the land and sea and sky around them—and so still.

Such was the manner of their setting out. And in the evening they drew near the little harbour of Tarbert; and all the west was aglow as if with fire. Even after they had dropped anchor, and the mountains of Cowal were black as night, there was a wan glare over the sky and out on the broad bosom of the loch. Then through the pallor of the twilight came the stars, growing and burning in the darkness, until Coquette thought they seemed just above the points of the tall masts. She still lingered on deck, when all the others had gone below. The sails were down, lights run up, and through the skylights of the saloon came a dull yellow glow, and a sound of voices which spoke of a comfortable and happy party beneath. Why was it that she was so sad? She had had her heart's wish; she was setting out on the longed-for excursion; yet here she was alone in the stern of the boat, looking up to the throbbing wonders of the heavens, or down into the starry plain of the sea, and feeling strangely isolated and miserable.

Lord Earlshope came in search of her.

"Why do you remain here alone?" he said.

"I do not know," said Coquette, rising wearily.

"They want you down below."

"I will go down; but it is very beautiful up here. I have never seen the stars so near. They seem to be almost touching the top of the hill there."

"You will have many opportunities of admiring the magical sunsets and the clear nights of these high latitudes. You may make the cruise as long as you please, you know."

"But you do not go with us?" she asked, with some little embarrassment.

"For a day or two, to give you a start. Unless I am found to be so useful that you all ask me to stay."

"Perhaps, then, you will come all the way with us?" said Coquette, somewhat too eagerly.

"Perhaps I may."

Coquette went down into the cabin then; and everybody was struck during the evening by her extreme amiability and cheerfulness. She quite won the heart of Lady Drum; who said that the effects of the sea air on the young lady were surprising and gratifying, and needed only to be supplemented by a little gentian.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOCHFYNE.

"It is Eden: it is the Garden of the Lord!" said the Minister; and the sad and sunken eyes that had grown dim over many books—that had grown weary, too, perhaps, with the bleakness of the upland moor—looked abroad over one of the fairest scenes in the world, and drank in the quiet and the clear sunshine of it. Far in front of him stretched the pale-blue plain of Lochfyne, that was as still, and smooth, and motionless as the pale-blue sky above. From this point of the Knapdale coast away up to the fork of Loch Gilp there was not a ripple on the calm surface; but over at the opposite shore a slight breeze was bearing up from the south, and there the blue of the water was intense and almost dark. Beyond this azure plain lay the brown and ruddy colours of

the Cowal hills—soft and smooth in the mist of the heat ; while along them moved great dashes of shadow thrown by the slowly-passing clouds above. Through the stillness of the sunshine they heard the soft whistle of the curlew ; they saw the solan flap his heavy white wings far down towards Arran ; they watched the solitary heron standing among the brown weeds out at the point of the shore—while now and again a sea-trout would leap a foot into the air, and fall with a splash again into the clear water. Then all around them, where they sat on the pebbly beach, was the drowsy warmth of the sun—glittering sharply on the birch and hazel bushes by the road—gleaming more softly on the great grey boulders—and dwelling mistily on the bushes, and heather, and rocks of the hill-side. And all this was so still that it scarcely seemed to be of this world ; the murmur of a stream coming down through the trees—trickling coolly and unseen beneath the tall ferns—had a far and mournful sound, like the sound of distant music in a dream.

The silence was broken by Coquette trying to whistle “The Last Rose of Summer.” Then she uttered a little cry of delight as she saw Lord Earlshope and Lady Drum coming along the road underneath the trees ; and when at length they had drawn near and had come down to the shore, Coquette said—

“Please, Lady Drum, will you tell me why my uncle becomes sad when he sees a pretty day and a pretty place. The good weather does not cheer him——”

“It cheers you, at all events,” said Lady Drum, with a kindly scrutiny of the girl’s face. “It gives you a colour and a brightness that makes an old woman like me feel young again only to look at ye. How have you been employing yourself ?”

“I ? I have been trying to whistle as my cousin whistles, but I cannot do it like him, perhaps because I have no pockets. He never is able to whistle unless he puts his hands in his pockets, and looks careless, and stands so ! Then I have watched the grey heron out at the rocks there, and I have been wishing he would get a fish.”

“I have been wishing I had a gun,” said the practical Whaup, with obvious discontent.

“And my uncle—he has been sitting and looking far

away—looking tired, too, and weary—just as if he were still in church.”

“Listening to one of my own sermons, I suppose?” said the Minister, taking his niece by the ear. “I hope I have not been oppressing you with my dulness?”

“Ah, no, no!” she said. “But I did not speak to you; you were thinking of old years gone away, were you not?”

The Minister looked at the girl: her eyes seemed to have divined what he was thinking of. But presently she turned to Lord Earlshope, and said—

“We go not to-day? We do not perhaps to-morrow either?”

“Why,” said Lord Earlshope, with a smile, “you might turn your newest accomplishment to some use. Could you whistle a breeze to us? We are helpless, you see, until we get wind.”

“I thought an English milord never wanted for anything that he did not get,” she said, with a glance of grave surprise.

The Whaup began to think that his cousin was a deal too clever to be safe.

“Would it grieve you so much to stay a few days here?” said Lord Earlshope.

“Not at all,” said Coquette; “I should prefer to stay here always.”

“I have had the yacht taken round to Maol-Daroeh Bay—that little shingly creek south of the harbour—since you spoke of the smell of the fishing-nets this morning. And when you wish to go into the village you must ask the captain to send you round in a boat. By the way, the gig will be here presently. I thought you might be too tired to care about walking back.”

“It was very kind of you to think of all that,” said Coquette, timidly, and looking to the ground.

It had already come to be regarded as a matter of course that everybody should consider Coquette as of first importance, and obey her slightest whim, and anticipate her smallest wishes. But the most systematic and persistent of her slaves was Earlshope himself, who seemed to have discovered a new method of passing the time in trying to please this young person by small attentions; and these he

offered in a friendly and familiar way which robbed them of any significance they might otherwise have had. The small tyrant, with the dark eyes, and the delicate, finely-formed face, accepted these ministrations in that spirit of careless amiability which was natural to her. Sometimes—but rarely—she would appear to be struck by this or that act of kindness, and seem almost disturbed that she could not convey a sense of her gratitude in the broken tongue she spoke; but ordinarily she passed from hour to hour in the same happy unconsciousness and delight in the present—glad that all her friends were around her, and comfortable—glad that she could add to their enjoyment by being cheerful and merry. Selfish she certainly was not; and there was no sort of trouble or pain she would not have endured to give pleasure to those who were her friends; but she would have been blind indeed had she not perceived that to give pleasure she had only to allow herself to be pleased—that her mere presence diffused a sense of satisfaction through the small meetings that were held in the saloon of the yacht, when the swinging lamps were lit, and the stars overhead shut out, and the amusements of the evening begun. The Whaup used to say that she was continually making pretty pictures; and he even condescended at times to express approval of the neatness of her dress, or to suggest alterations in the disposal of her big masses of dark-brown hair.

“And in time, you know,” he remarked to her, “you will get to talk like other people.”

“I do not wish to talk like you,” said Coquette.

“I can at least make myself intelligible,” he retorted.

“Do not I become intelligible?” asked Coquette, meekly; and then, of course, the least symptom of doubt on her part disarmed the Whaup’s criticism, and made him declare that she spoke very well indeed.

The measured splash of oars was now heard; and the heron slowly rose into the air with a few heavy flaps of his wings, and proceeded to settle on a farther promontory. The gig, with its four rowers, came round the point; and in a few minutes the heavily-laden boat was on its way back to the yacht.

Coquette was delighted with Maol-Daroch Bay; she insisted upon landing at once; and she and the Whaup

accordingly ran up the white shingle, and made for the hill-side. Coquette stood upon a rock that was perched high among the heathery roughnesses of the hill, and waved her handkerchief to those who had by this time gone on board the yacht. Lord Earlshope answered with his cap, and Mr. Cassilis with his walking-stick ; Lady Drum had gone below.

"Now we shall go up this hill, and round, and down, and back by the rocks of the shore," said Coquette.

"What's the use ?" said the Whaup. "I haven't a gun ; and if I had, I daren't shoot up here."

"Why must you kill something wherever you go ?" said Coquette.

"Why must you scramble along a hill, all for nothing, like a goat ?" demanded the Whaup.

"Because it is something to do," answered Coquette.

"You are a pretty invalid !" remarked the Whaup. "But here, give me your hand—if you want climbing, I'll give you enough of it."

"No," said Coquette, planting her foot firmly. "I like you when you are gentle, like Lord Earlshope ; but I am not going to be pulled by a big rough boy."

"I have a great mind to carry you against your will," said the Whaup, a demon of mischief beginning to laugh in his eyes.

"I would kill you if you tried !" said Coquette, with a sudden frown.

He came forward and took her hand quite gently.

"Have I vexed you ? Are you really angry, Coquette ? You didn't think I was serious, did you ? You know I wouldn't vex you, if I got the world for it."

A certain quivering of the lip, for a moment uncertain, resolved itself into a smile—and that into a laugh—and then Coquette said—

"You are a very good boy, Tom, when you like. Some one will be very fond of you some day."

The Whaup grew more serious then ; and, indeed, it seemed to Coquette that ever after that time her cousin's manner towards her was more reserved and grave than it had been before. He did not try to drag her into his boyish pranks, as he had been wont to do. On the contrary,

he himself seemed somewhat altered : and at times she caught him in a deep reverie. He began to talk more about his coming winter studies at the Glasgow University ; and was even found, on rare occasions, absorbed in a book.

He did not cease to exhibit those frank and manly ways which she had always liked ; nor did he even put any marked restraint on his relations with her. He was as impertinently straightforward as ever, if the neatness of her wristbands called for commendation, or if the streak of dark blue ribbon did not sufficiently curb the wildness of her hair. But he was more serious in his ways ; and sometimes she caught him looking at her from a distance, in a cold way, as if she were a stranger, and he was desirous to impress her appearance on his memory.

That evening he said to her briefly—

“Lord Earlshope and I are going to start at two to-morrow morning to go along the coast and see if we can shoot some seals.”

“But why should you take trouble to kill them ? Is it a pleasure to kill them ?”

“Bah !” he said. “Women don’t understand these things. You wouldn’t hear a man ask such a question—except, perhaps, Earlshope himself—he might—he seems to think in lots of things exactly as you do.”

This was said with no particular intention ; and yet the girl looked apprehensive as though the Whaup had been making some complaint.

Then some time after, he remarked to her—

“I don’t think wicked people seem so wicked when you come to know them.”

Coquette was looking over the taffrail ; she turned towards him and said calmly—

“Do you mean me or Lord Earlshope ?”

“Why should you always think of him ?” said the Whaup. “Would you be very angry if what I said applied to both of you ?”

With that he laughed and walked away, leaving Coquette to wonder whether her cousin, too, regarded her as a wicked person.

CHAPTER XVIII.

COQUETTE SAILS TO THE NORTH.

IN the darkness the yellow lights of the yacht were shining on the spars and the rigging ; the water that lapped against her side sparkled with stars of phosphorescent fire ; and a slight wind, coming through the gloom, told of the rustling of ferns and bushes on the hillside—when certain dusky figures appeared on deck, and began to converse in whispers. The Whaup was yawning dreadfully, and perhaps wishing there was not a seal in the world ; but he had proposed the adventure, to which Lord Earlshope had good-naturedly acceded, and so he felt himself bound in honour not to retract.

With their guns in their hands they got down into the dinghy which was waiting for them, and the two men began to pull away gently from the yacht. The blades of the oars struck a flash of silver deep into the water ; and the white stars of the waves burned even more keenly than the other reflected stars which, farther away, were glittering on the black surface of the sea. Towards the land some vague and dusky forms that were scarcely visible were known to be the iron-bound coast ; and in uncomfortable proximity the Whaup could hear the waves heaving in upon the rocks. There was no other sound but that and the measured rowing. Overhead the innumerable stars burned clear ; there were flickerings of the reflected light on the moving plain of the sea ; and in there at the shore a vague darkness, and the dashing of unseen waves.

When they had thus proceeded a certain distance along the coast, the bow of the boat was turned shore-ward, and the men pulled gently in toward the rocks. In the starlight the outlines of the hills above now became dimly visible ; but underneath blackness universal seemed to hide both shore and sea. The noise all around them, however, told the Whaup that they must be near land ; and in a few minutes the boat was cautiously run in, one of the men jumping out and holding her bow. With a double-barrelled gun in his

right hand, the Whaup now found himself struggling over a series of rocks that were treacherously covered with seaweed ; while, as he got on to higher ground, these rocks increased in size, and the gaps between them were plunged in even profounder darkness. Presently he heard Earlshope calling on him to halt ; and shortly thereafter one of the sailors, who had landed, appeared clambering over the boulders in order to take the lead.

Their course was now a sufficiently perilous one. The great masses of tumbled rock that here form the coast line appeared to go precipitately down into the sea—a great black gulf which they could hear splashing beneath them ; while ever and anon they came to deep ravines in the sides of the hill, down which small streamlets could be heard trickling. Their progress along these rough precipices—generally some fifty or a hundred feet above the sea—was picturesque but uncomfortable. The Whaup found that, in spite of all his wild plunges and daring leaps, the sailor distanced him considerably : and ahead of him he could only indistinctly see a black figure which sometimes rose up clear and defined against the star-lit sky, and at other times was vaguely seen to crawl along the surface of a grey shelf of rock like some dusky alligator. Now he found himself up to the neck among immense brackens ; again he was plunged into some mossy hole, in which his boots were like to remain. Not unfrequently he had to go on hands and knees across some more than usually precipitous shelf ; the stock of his gun making sore work of his knuckles as he clambered up the rough surface.

Another halt was called. When the small bay around Battle Island—where the seals were expected to be found—had nearly been reached, it was determined, to prevent noise, that they should take off their boots and creep along the rocks on their stocking-soles. The stars were now paling ; and, as the faint light of dawn would soon appear, every precaution was necessary that the seals should not become aware of their approach. No sooner, indeed, had the Whaup removed his boots than he danced a wild dance of exultation, so delighted was he to find that the soles of his stockings caught so easily and surely on the surface of the boulders. There was now far less risk of a sudden tumble headlong

into the sea—although, to be sure, even up here among the rocks, it was not pleasant, in the cold of the night, to find one's feet go down into a pool of mossy water.

"Do you regret having come?" said Lord Earlshope.

"Regret it!" said the Whaup. "I'd wade a mile up to my neck to shoot a seal."

Then he added, with his usual frankness—

"I didn't expect you'd have been able to keep up with us."

"Why?"

"Well," said the Whaup, seeing before him the outline of a tall, lithe, slim figure, "I didn't think you were much good for this sort of rough work."

Earlshope laughed—not very loudly.

"Perhaps not," he said; he did not think it worth while to astonish Master Tom with tales of what he had done in the way of muscular performances. "But you should not be severe on me. I rather fancy this is a piece of folly; and I have undertaken it merely to interest you."

The Whaup noticed at this moment that his companion had in his hand the heavy rifle, which he carried in a very easy and facile manner.

"You may be stronger than you look," observed the Whaup—throwing out this qualification from mere good-humour. He still retained an impression that Earlshope, with his lady-like fingers, and his pretty moustache, and his delicate jewellery, was something of a milksop.

Absolute silence was now the watchword as they advanced: there was no scraping of heels on the grit of the rocks—no clink of a trigger-guard in putting down the hand for safety's sake. In a thief-like fashion they stole along the high and rugged coast, now clambering over huge blocks of stone, and again fighting their way through fern and bush, with their heads low and their footfalls light. At length the sailor stopped, and motioned to Lord Earlshope and the Whaup to descend. Great was the joy of the latter on perceiving that at last there was a level bit of shore towards which they were making their way. Having gone down, in a snake-like fashion, over the mighty boulders, they now crept on towards the beach; and at length took up their position behind two pieces of rock, from which they

could see the channel in front of them, lying between the land and the dusky object which they knew to be Battle Island.

Very still and weird was this place in the dark of the morning, with the cold air from the sea stirring in the brushwood overhead, and with the ceaseless splash of the waves echoing all along the solitary coast. A faint film of cloud had come over the sky, and hid the stars; but in the east there seemed to be a pallid grey far across the dark water towards Ardlamont Point. And, by-and-by, as they crouched behind the boulders, and waited, there was visible—whence it had come no one could say—a brilliant planet, burning like gold in the wan mist above the eastern sea; and they knew that it was the star of the morning. Slowly the dawn approached—slowly the dark outline of Battle Island became more defined; and the black hollows of the waves that crept in towards the shore had now a pale hue between them, that scarcely could be called light.

Patiently they waited, scanning the outline of the island-rocks, and watching all the water around for the rolling of the seals. There was no sign. Perhaps the grey in the east was waxing stronger—it was impossible to tell, for their eyes had grown bewildered with the constant motion of the tumbling waves and the eager scrutiny of these black lines and hollows.

Suddenly there was a quick chirp just beside them, and the Whaup's heart leapt with alarm. He turned to find a sea-lark running quite near him; and, at the same moment that he perceived this first symptom of awakening life, he became aware that it had grown lighter out by Ardlamont Point.

And now, with a strange and rapid transition, as if the world had begun to throb with the birth of the new day, there arose in the eastern sky a great smoke of red—a pink mist that mounted and spread as if from some mighty conflagration beyond the line of the sea. All in the west—by the far shores of Knapdale and up the long stretch of Lochfyne—there brooded a dull and mysterious fog, in which hills and islands lay like gloomy clouds; but over there at the eastern horizon there was a glow of rose-coloured smoke, which as yet had no reflection on the sea. And

while they looked on it, half forgetting the object of their quest in the splendour of this sight—the perpetual wonder and mystery of the dawn—the red mist parted, and broke into long parallel swathes of cloud, which were touched with sharp, jewel-like lines of fire; and as the keenness of the crimson waxed stronger and stronger, there came over the sea a long and level flush of salmon-colour, which bathed the waves in its radiance, leaving their shadows an intense dark green. The glare and the majesty of this spectacle lasted but for a few minutes. The intensity of the colours subsided; the salmon-coloured waves grew of a pale neutral tint; a cold twilight spread over the sky; and with the stirring of the wind came in the new life of the world—the crowing of some grouse far up in the heather, the chirping of birds in the bushes, the calling of curlew, and the slow flapping of a pair of herons coming landward from the sea.

Suddenly Lord Earlshope, who had been peering over the edge of the rock before him, touched his companion's arm. The Whaup went forward on his knees, and stealthily looked over in the direction pointed out. He could see nothing but the dark rocks of Battle Island, in the midst of the greyish-green water. He was about to express his disappointment, when it seemed to him that the outline of a bit of rock at the end of the island was moving. Could it be the undulations of the waves which were surging all around; or was that motion of the black line the motion of an animal that had got up on it from the water?

Lord Earlshope handed his rifle to the Whaup, with a hurried gesture. But the arrangement had been that, while the one had a rifle and the other a double-barrelled fowling-piece loaded with heavy shot, the distance of the seal was to decide which should fire. Accordingly, the Whaup refused to take the rifle.

"It is your shot," he whispered.

"I don't want to kill the beast: why should I?" said Earlshope, carelessly.

Even as the Whaup was in the act of putting the barrel of the rifle cautiously over the rock, he remembered what Coquette had said; and also that he had made the haphazard guess that Earlshope would probably say the same.

But there was little chance to think of such things. His breath was coming and going at double-quick time, and he held his teeth tight as he brought the sight of the barrel up to the line of rock. It rested there for a moment—there was a spurt of fire—a bang that echoed and re-echoed up among the rocky hills—and then Lord Earlshope rose, glad to be able to stretch his limbs at last.

“You have either missed altogether or shot him dead ; there was no movement whatever when you fired.”

“By Jove, then,” said the Whaup, with tremendous eagerness, “I have shot him dead if there was a seal there at all—for I know the muzzle of the rifle was as steady as a rock when I fired.”

“We shall see presently,” said his companion. “They will bring the boat up now.”

Presently, the two men were seen pulling round the point ; and then Lord Earlshope and the Whaup went to the edge of the water, got into the boat, and were pulled out to the island. Very anxiously did one of them, at least, regard that small, dark promontory ; but there was nothing visible. They drew nearer—they now saw the surface of the rocks clearly—and that was all.

“Very sorry,” said Lord Earlshope, “but you seem to have missed.”

“I didn’t miss !” the Whaup insisted. “Let us land, and see.”

So, at a convenient spot, they ran the boat in, and got out among the seaweed, and then made their way along to the end of the island. Suddenly the Whaup uttered a piercing yell of delight, and began to clamber along the rocks in the most reckless fashion. Lord Earlshope, following after him, found him grasping with both his hands a round-headed, fat, and limp-looking animal, which he was endeavouring to drag up to the higher platform.

“There—did I miss ?” he cried.

“Well, since you have got him, what do you mean to do with him ?” said Lord Earlshope, with a smile. “You have had the satisfaction of killing him, and the much rarer satisfaction of getting him after killing him—but what then ?”

The Whaup dropped the seal on to the rocks again ; and

looked at the unfortunate creatures with some disappointment mingled with his pride.

"What *do* they make of these brutes? You can't get seal-skin waistcoats out of that soapy-looking stuff?"

"You may eat him, if you like—I suppose he is not much oilier than a solan. However, we may as well lug him into the boat, and get back to Maol-Daroch. It is singular we have seen none of his companions, though."

The men approached the slippery animal with much more caution than the Whaup had displayed—they were evidently not quite sure that the whiskered mouth might not open and proceed from a bark to a bite. He was got into the boat at last; Earlshope and the Whaup followed; and again the fall of the oars was heard along the lonely coast. It was now broad daylight; and when they reached Maol-Daroch Bay, the sun was shining on the green hill-side, and on the white beach, and on the far blue plain of the sea.

Coquette was standing at the stern of the yacht as they approached, with the sunlight colouring her cheek and gleaming on the white handkerchief she waved to them.

"Have you had a success?" she said. "Oh, how very miserable you look!"

"It isn't half as meeserayble as we feel," remarked the Whaup, who was sleepy, and hungry, and stiff.

"You have not shot nothing!" said Coquette, clapping her hands, "or you would come home proud and fierce—like the old north warriors when they did come home from the sea. What is that in the boat? Ah! You shoot one?—yes! It is beastly-looking—I mean it is hideous—horrid!"

The seal was allowed for the present to remain in the small boat, and Earlshope and the Whaup came on deck. To the sleepy eyes of the Whaup, who was cold and wretched in spite of his triumph, his cousin seemed quite offensively cheerful, and bright, and comfortable.

"Have you had breakfast yet?" said Lord Earlshope.

"No," she answered. "I have made friends with your steward, and he has given me two apples and a big bunch of grapes. I am sorry I have eaten all—I cannot give you one."

"Thank you," said he. "But I suppose your cousin will follow my example, get down below, and have a sleep."

Good-bye till lunch-time, Miss Cassilis—I presume by then we shall be up at Ardrishaig.”

So they went below ; and Coquette sat down, and took up a book she had been carrying with her. But she could not read ; for there was sunlight abroad, and the fluttering of wind through the thin ropes that stretched up into the blue, and the ripple of the bright water all around. They were about to set out now on their voyage northward—that far wandering into the unknown Western Isles of which she had dreamed—and he had spoken no word of his leaving them. Would he go all the way, then, and spend all this happy time with them, afar from the dull routine-life and the harsh-thinking people of the land ? At she thought of the fair prospect that was thus opened out before her, the pages of the book that lay in the sunshine were filled with pictures—wonderful landscapes that burned in the brightest of colours, and had the stirring of wind and of light in them. Lady Drum came on deck, and was surprised to find the girl sitting all alone, looking so wonderfully pleased and happy.

“To-day we set sail,” said Coquette, almost laughing with pure gladness, “and go away—away beyond all you can think of—among hills, and mountains, and the sea.”

“Perhaps you would be glad not to come back ?” said Lady Drum, looking into the happy face, and holding both the girl’s hands.

“Yes—I should be glad not to come back—it is so pleasant here—and where we are going, will not that be far more pleasant ?”

“That is what young folks always think,” said Lady Drum—“always looking forward with hope in their eyes. But we who have got older, and have gone farther on the voyage—we look back.”

And while these two and Mr. Cassilis were at breakfast, they heard the sails being hoisted above ; and when they went on deck, they found the great breadths of white canvas lying over before a southerly breeze ; and there was a hissing of water at the bow and along the side ; and, while Maol-Daroch Bay, and Tarbert, and all the rocks and islands about were slowly receding to the south, before them there opened up the great blue breadth of Lochfyne, with the far, faint hills shining mistily in the sun.

CHAPTER XIX.

COQUETTE DISCOURSES.

"I THINK your cousin is very fond of you," said Lady Drum, with a good-natured smile, to Coquette. They were running up the blue waters of Lochfyne, before a light and steady breeze. The Whaup had concealed himself at the bow, lying prone, with the barrels of his breech-loader peeping over the rail.

"Oh, yes, I am sure he is," said Coquette, seriously. "He will do anything for me—he has dared to fight disagreeable people for me—he has got into danger for me—he is very kind—and just now, look! he is trying to get for me some wild bird—I do not know its name—which has beautiful feathers."

"All that is nothing," said Lady Drum, taking Coquette's hand in hers. "Don't you think that some day or other he may ask you to marry him?"

The elderly lady who was now looking at Coquette's face, expected—as elderly ladies do expect when they begin to tease girls about love-affairs—that her companion would blush, and protest, and be pleased, and affect to be indignant. On the contrary, Coquette said, simply and gravely—

"Yes, I have thought of that. But he is too young."

"And you also, perhaps. In a year or two he will be a man, and you will be marriageable."

"Then," said Coquette, dubiously, "it may be. I do not know, because my uncle has not spoken to me of any such thing; but he may think it a good marriage, and arrange it."

"Bless me, lassie!" exclaimed Lady Drum, in amazement. "Is it true that folk make slaves of their children in that way in France? I have heard of it; I did not believe it. In this country girls arrange their own marriages."

"That, too, is very good," said Coquette, "when it is with their parents' wish. It is of more consequence that a girl pleases her parents than herself, is it not?"

"And make herself miserable all her life?" said Lady

Drum, startled to find herself arguing—in defiance of all precedent—on the side of youth as against age.

“But that does not happen,” said Coquette. “Now one of my good friends in Nantes—she was told by her parents that she had to marry a young gentleman who was coming home from the Martinique, and had never been to France before. I remember she and her parents did go down by the railway to St. Nazaire, when they heard the boat had come; and a week or two after I did see Babiche—that is Isabella, you know—and oh! how proud and happy she was. And they are married, and live at Paimbœuf, just across the river; and Babiche is as happy as she can be. But then,” added Coquette wistfully, “the young gentleman was very good-looking.”

They were interrupted by a loud “bang!” at the bow. The Whaup had fired at a couple of guillemots that were some distance off on the water; but they had “ducked the flash,” and Coquette was not enriched with any of their plumage. Then she resumed:

“What I do think very good is this,” said Coquette, “when your parents speak of a marriage, and it is left not altogether fixed; but all the same, if they die, and you are left alone, and you have no friends, there is the one person who comes to you and says, ‘Now I will take care of you,’ and you know they would have approved. And the same it is if you have got into trouble—suppose that you did become miserable through making an attachment for some one who does not care for you—there is always this good friend who likes you, and you can marry, and forget all that is past, and be like other people for the rest of your life.”

Lady Drum could scarce believe her ears. Had she been called upon to argue on the usual side, she could have repeated those admirably wise maxims which elderly ladies have at their command (and which they never thought of obeying in their youth); but surely things were ordered differently in France when this young creature—whose soft dark eyes were apparently made to steal men’s hearts away—could be found gravely arguing a business-like view of love affairs, which even a shrewd and able Scotchwoman would have scrupled to advance.

"You mean," said Lady Drum, "that French girls like their parents to choose a husband, so that, if they have an unfortunate love affair, they can still fall back on this substitute?"

"Oh, no," said Coquette; "you do say things harshly. But who knows what might happen?—and if your old *fiancé* is still faithful—and would like to marry—you make him happy, do you not?"

"And is that the *rôle* you have sketched out for your good-natured cousin?" asked Lady Drum, rather vexed with this plain enunciation of a theory which, although it was based upon filial submission, seemed to her to have dangerous elements in it.

"Ah, no," said Coquette, gravely; "I hope I shall never have to go to him and say that I am willing to become his wife only because I am miserable and unhappy. He deserves something better than that, does he not?"

"And so do you," said Lady Drum, in a kindly fashion. "You must not go anticipating misfortune for yourself in that way. You must forget the notions those French people put into your head. You will take to our simple Scotch habits—and you will marry the man you love best, and not any substitute at anybody's bidding. A pleasant courtship—a happy marriage—and an even, comfortable, respectable life, that is the custom here."

Indeed, Lady Drum's notions of romance had been derived chiefly from the somewhat easy and confident overtures made by Sir Peter while he was yet a young man, and had a waist. The gay and rotund Sir Peter at no time would have looked well in the character of Manfred; and his performance on a guitar under his mistress's window would have been but indifferent. Lady Drum knew she was as happy as most married women; and hoped that these dangerous French ideas about wild love affairs being atoned for by an after-marriage with a substitute chosen by relatives, would not be translated into the uncongenial atmosphere of Western Scotland.

"I thought," said Coquette, "that the Scotch people were very hard in their obedience to duty—and against pleasure and comfort. Then I said to myself, 'Alas! I shall never become Scotch.' But now I do think on one

point I am more dutiful than you. I would marry anybody that my uncle and all of you considered I ought to marry."

"And make love to somebody else, as is the fashion in France!" said Lady Drum, with a touch of anger.

"It is no such fashion in France," said Coquette. "It is only that the Scotch are ignorant of all people but themselves—and think nobody so good as themselves—and are suspicious!"

Lady Drum's anger broke into a smile at the pretty vehemence with which Coquette fought for her countrywomen; and at this moment Lord Earlshope came on deck and asked what was the matter in dispute. Coquette caught Lady Drum's hand, and pressed it. The old Scotchwoman looked at the girl, and saw that she was quite pale—a circumstance that puzzled her not a little in after moments of reflection.

"Well," said Lady Drum, obeying Coquette's unspoken entreaty, "we were talking about—about French schools for the most part."

Further inquiry was rendered impossible; for at this moment the yacht was running into the harbour of Ardrishaig, and there was a good deal of bustle on board. The Whaup came aft also, taking the cartridges out of his gun; and began to make vague suggestions about lunch. Finally, it was resolved that, so soon as Mr. Cassilis could be prevailed on to remove his books and writing materials from the table of the saloon, they should go down to have that meal which was troubling the mind of the Whaup, and so escape the tedium of the preparations necessary for going through the Crinan canal.

Why was Coquette so silent and *distracte* when—after a long and solemn grace from the Minister—they began the French-looking repast which had been served for them?

"You are still thinking of the *pension*, are you not, Miss Cassilis?" said Earlshope. "You should give us some initiation into the mysteries of so sacred a place. Was there anything romantic about it?"

"Our *pension* was full of mystery and romance," said Coquette, brightening up, "because of two German young

ladies who were there. They introduced—what shall I call it?—exaltation. Do you know what it is? When one girl makes another *exaltée*, because of her goodness or her beauty, and worships her, and kisses her dress when she passes her, and serves her in all things, yet dare not speak to her? And the girl who is *exaltée*—she must be proud and cold, and show scorn for her attendant—even although she has been her friend. It was these German young ladies from the Bohemian-Wald who introduced it—and they were tall and dark, and very beautiful, and many would have wished to make them *exaltées*, but they were always the first to seek out some one whom they admired very much, and no one was so humble and obedient as they were. All the *pension* was filled with it—it was a religion, an enthusiasm—and you would see girls crying and kneeling on the floor, to show their love and admiration for their friend.”

“And you—were you ever *exaltée*?” asked Lord Earlshope.

“No,” said Coquette, with a little shrug. “One or two of my friends did wish to make me *exaltée*, but I did laugh at them, and they were angry. I did not wish to be cruel to anyone. I did prefer to go about and be friends with everybody in the middle of so much distraction.”

“And did you never exalt anybody?”

“No, it was too troublesome,” said Coquette. At which Lady Drum smiled.

“It seems to me,” observed the Whaup, coolly, “that it was a clever device to let a lot of girls make love to each other, for want of anybody else. It was keeping their hand in, as it were.”

“It is a pity you were not there,” said Coquette, graciously. “We should have been charmed to make you *exalté*.”

“And do you think I’d have treated any of you with scorn?” said the Whaup, with a grin, and quite ignoring Coquette’s retort. “No. Far from it. I should have——”

The Whaup glanced at his father, and paused—indeed, his father was calmly regarding him.

“You would have gone from one to the other,” said Lord Earlshope, gravely, “and persuaded her that she was the victim of a hallucination.”

"In worshipping me?" said the Whaup. "Well, now I call that a very good bit of sarcasm. There is no spite in it, as in women's sarcasm—but a clean, sharp sword-thrust, straight from the shoulder, skewering you as if you were an eel, and as if you had nothing to do but wriggle."

"Thomas," said the Minister, severely, "you are not accustomed to take so much claret."

"That, sir," replied the Whaup, with perfect coolness, "is why I am helping myself so liberally at present, with Lord Earlshope's kind permission."

Lady Drum shook her head; but Coquette laughed in her low, quiet fashion; and the Whaup familiarly nodded to Lord Earlshope, as much as to say, "Gave it to the old boy that time."

Then, having fetched hats and shawls from their respective state-rooms, they went above and got on shore, setting out to walk along the banks of the Crinan until the *Caroline* should get clear of the locks.

CHAPTER XX.

LETTERS FROM AIRLIE.

"OH," said Coquette, as they walked along the winding path, with the beautiful scenery of the district gradually opening up before them, "I did get two letters for you, uncle, at Tarbert, and forgot all about them. Here they are; shall I read them?"

The two letters which she produced from her pocket had the Airlie stamp on them; and Mr. Cassilis at once bade her do as she pleased. So she broke the seal of the first, and began to read aloud:

"'Honoured Sir and master in the Lord,—I tak up my pen to let ye know that I have been,'—what is this?" said Coquette.

The Minister took it from her, and continued himself:

"—that I have been stung. Atweel I wat no man ever heard me complain unnecessary-wise about my poseetion in

life, which I accept with gratitude and humeclity from the Giver of all Good—to wit the Dispenser of all Mercies at present and to come ; but I maun tak the leeberly o' saying, honoured Sir, that I cannot bide in this house any langer to be treated worse than the beast that perisheth. From the fingers to the elbows—and my face and neck likewise—am I covered wi' the venomous stings o' bees, and do suffer a pain grievous, and like unto the plagues which were put on the people of Egypt for their sins. Honoured Sir, I canna bear wi' they callants any longer, as I chanced upon one o' them laughing like to split, and am aware it was a skeem to inflict this wrong and injury upon me, which I howp will cause you to inquire into, and begging the favour of a reply to say when ye are coming back—and what sore punishment will be meeted out to them that richly deserve the same—I am, your humble and obedient servant in the Lord,

“ANDREW BOGUE.”

“Can it be,” said the Minister, when he had read this letter aloud, “can it be that those mischievous boys have conspired to set a lot of bees to sting him?”

Coquette looked somewhat frightened ; but the Whaup observed, cheerfully—

“Indeed, sir, those brothers of mine are fearful. I have done my best with them to keep them out of mischief ; but it is no use. And to go and set a bees' bike at an auld man——!”

The Whaup shook his head disconsolately. His brothers were incorrigible—even he had been compelled to desist from his efforts to improve them.

“Do you hear him?” said Coquette, in a low voice to Lord Earlshope. “And it was he himself who did plan all that about the bees, and got them, and put them in a bag.”

“And then,” said Earlshope, aloud, to the Whaup, “the worst of it is that they go and blame you for what they do themselves ; so that the whole district has got to dread you, whereas you have been trying to put down these pranks.”

The Whaup turned towards Lord Earlshope, and slowly winked one of his eyes. By this time the Minister had

opened the other letter, and was perusing it in silence. It ran as follows :—

“Dear and Reverend Sir,—It behoves me to accomplish, or in other words to fulfil the promise which I, as an elder in your church, made to you, on your setting forth, to make you acquaint, or familiarise you with, the events and occurrences, the state of feeling, and general condition of this parish. Towards yourself, their spiritual governor, leader, and guide, the people do show themselves most loyal and friendly, hoping you will continue your voyages abroad to the benefiting of your health, and that you may be saved from the perils of the waters—or, as I might have said, from the dangers that encompass them who go down to the sea in ships. As for the young man who is to take your pulpit, God willing, next Sabbath, report speaks well of his forbears ; but divers persons who have heard him in Arbroath, Greenock, and elsewhere, do fear that he is not severe enough in defining the lines and limits of doctrine, holding rather to the admonitory side, which does not give his hearers sufficient chance, or opportunity, to use a less pagan word, to get at his own stand-point, which is a grave, or, it might be said with safety, a serious matter ; for whereas those ministers who have been long with us, and who have given proofs of their doctrinal soundness, may be permitted to deal more with reproof and exhortation, it is for the younger generation of preachers to declare themselves clearly and sharply, that the church universal may not be ensnared and entrapped in the dark, there being, I grieve to hear, a dangerous leaven of looseness in the colleges and other places where young men congregate, or, as I might say, come together. The only news of importance, besides this subject, which I have to communicate, is that Pensioner Lamont did once more, on the night of Tuesday, become most abnormal drunk, and did dance and play his fiddle in an uproarious and godless manner in the house of Mrs. Pettigrew ; and likewise that Lauchie—who is vulgarly called Field Lauchie—Macintyre’s wife’s bairn has been visited with the rash, which I hope will be taken as a sign of the warning finger of Providence, and cause the said Lauchie to give over, or, as I may say, abandon, his abominable and reckless conduct of

walking to the town of Ardrossan every Sabbath day, and remaining there until the evening, I fear in no good company. This, dear and reverend sir, from yours to command,
ÆNEAS GILLESPIE."

"Good news from Airlie?" asked Lady Drum.

"Yes—in a manner, yes," replied the Minister, with dreamy eyes. It was a new thing for him to hear only the distant echo of his parish.

"Your boys seem to want their elder brother to control them?" continued Lady Drum.

"Yes," said the Minister. "He prevails on them to leave the Manse quiet when he is there, though it may be only to lead them into greater mischief elsewhere. But they will have to look after themselves now for the rest of the autumn and winter."

"Why?"

"Because Tom is returning to his studies at Glasgow," observed the Minister.

Coquette had been standing to watch some water-hens which, on the opposite bank, were scrambling about in the rushes, and she came up only in time to hear these last words.

"You are going to Glasgow?" she said to the Whaup.

"Yes," he replied, with some gravity. "I mean to work hard this winter."

"And you will not be at Airlie all the time?"

"Does that distress you?" he asked.

"Nobody but Leesiebess and her husband," said Coquette, wistfully. "It will not be pleasurable—the Manse—in the dark time of the winter, with the cold of the hill. But I am glad you do go. You will work hard; you will forget your games of mischief; you will come back more like a man; and when you tell me you have studied well, and have got—what is it called?—your certification, I will come out to meet you at the Manse, and I will have a wreath of laurel-leaves for you, and you will be the great hero of the hour."

"It is something to look forward to," said the Whaup, almost sadly. "And when I come back will you be just the same, Coquette?—as quiet and happy and pretty as you always are?"

"I do not know that I am quiet, or happy, or pretty, more than any one else," said Coquette; "but I hope I shall be always the same to you, if you come back in one year—two years—ten years."

The Whaup did not reply to that, but he said to himself: "*If she would only wait two years! In two years' time I should have worked to some purpose, and I would come home and ask her to marry me.*"

All the rest of their walk along the pretty and picturesque bank he was restless and impatient in manner—speaking to nobody, thinking much. He cut with his stick at the rushes in the water or at the twigs of the hedge, as if they were the obstacles that lay in his way towards the beautiful goal he was dreaming of. At last he got into the yacht again and went below. When the others followed, some time after, they found him busy with his books.

Coquette went to him and said:

"Why do you read? Have I offended you? Are you angry with me?"

"No, no," he said, rising and going away; "you are a deal too kind towards me, and towards all those people who don't understand how good you are."

Coquette stood by in blank astonishment; she let him pass her and go up on deck without uttering a word.

By this time the *Caroline* was lying at anchor in Loch Crinan, and the afternoon was drawing on apace. The day had dulled somewhat, and far out among the western isles that lay along the horizon there was a faint, still mist that made them shadowy and vague. Nevertheless, the Whaup would have the skipper give him the pinnace for a run out in quest of the guillemot plumage that Coquette had desired; and when, indeed, that young lady appeared on deck, she beheld the tiny boat, with its spritsail catching a light breeze, running far out beyond the sharp island-rocks that crowd the entrance to the natural harbour.

"It is so small a boat to go out to sea," she said to Lord Earlshope, who was following the pinnace with his glass.

Meanwhile, the Whaup had stationed himself at the prow of the small craft, steadying himself with his gun as she began to dip to the waves; while all in front and around there opened out the great panorama of lochs and islands,

between Luing and Scarba on the north, and the three dusky peaks of Jura in the south. The gloomy Sound of Corrievreckan was steeped in mist ; and Dubhchamus Point was scarcely visible ; but nearer at hand, in the middle of the grey and desolate sea, lay Maoile Rock, and Ris an Valle, with Ruisker and the Ledge apparently under the shadow of the Paps. The bright little boat, despite her ballast and her cargo, went lightly as a feather over the waves ; and the Whaup kept his eyes alert. There were plenty of birds about—the solitary solan poised high in the air—the heron calling from out of the twilight that hung over the distant shores—gulls of every description, from the pretty kittiwake to the great black-winged depredator—but in vain he scanned the heaving plain of waves for the special object of his quest. At last, however, they heard the cry of the divers down in the south, and thither the small boat was directed. The sound came nearer and nearer—apparently there were dozens or hundreds of them all about—yet no feather of one of them could be seen. Then there was a swift rustle out beyond the boat—a dark moving line, rapidly crossing the waves—and the pink flame leapt from the two barrels of the Whaup's gun. The pinnacle was put about, and run towards a certain dark speck that was seen floating on the waves ; while at the same moment over all the west there broke a great and sudden fire of yellow—streaming down from the riven clouds upon the dusky grey of the sea. In this wild light the islands grew both dark and distant ; and near at hand there was a glare on the water that dazzled the eyes and made all things look fantastic and strange. It lasted but for a moment. The clouds slowly closed again ; the west grew grey and cold ; over all the sea there fell the leaden-hued twilight ; while the bow of the boat—going this way and that in search of the dead bird—seemed to move forward into the waste of waters like the nose of a retriever.

They picked up the bird—there was but one. The Whaup was not satisfied. They could still hear the distant calling, and so they stood out a bit farther to sea—none of them, perhaps, noticing how rapidly the darkness was descending.

“There is a squall coming,” said the man at the tiller, looking far down into the south-west.

The Whaup saw nothing but a strangely black line along the misty horizon—a line of deep purple. He was unwilling to go back then. Besides, both sea and sky were sufficiently calm; and the coming breeze would just suffice to run them into Loch Crinan.

“We had better make for the yacht, sir,” said the man nearest him. “It looks bad down there.”

Unwilling as he was to give up, the Whaup perceived that the thin line of black had become a broader band. He was still looking far over the mystic plain of the waves towards that lurid streak, when he seemed to hear an unfamiliar sound in the air. It was not a distant sound, but apparently a muttering as of voices all around and in front, hoarse, and low, and ominous. And while he still stood watching, with a curiosity which dulled all sense of fear, the slow widening of the blackness across the sea, a puff of wind smote his cheek, and brought the message that those troubled voices of the waves were deepening into a roar. Near the boat the sea was comparatively calm, and the darkening sky was quite still; but it appeared as though a great circle were inclosing them, and that the advancing line of storm could be heard raging in the darkness without being itself visible. In the intense stillness that reigned around them, this great hoarse, deepening tumult of sounds found a strange echo; and then, while the men were making ready for the squall, the water in the immediate neighbourhood became powerfully agitated—a hissing of breaking waves was heard all around—then the first blow of the wind struck the boat as if with a hammer.

By this time the sail had been brailled up; and the tempest that now came roaring along the black surface of the sea smote nothing but spars and oars as it hurried the pinnacle along with it. Running before the wind, and plunging into the great hollows of the waves, that seemed to be racing towards the shore, the light boat shipped but little water, except when a gust of wind drove the crest of a breaking wave across the rowers; but there came torrents of rain sweeping along with the gale; and presently they found themselves shut out from sight of land by the driving clouds. The Whaup still kept outlook at the bow; but he had long ago laid aside his gun.

It was now a question of making the entrance to the loch without running on the rocks with which it is studded ; and as the boat rose and sank with the waves, and reeled and staggered under the tearing wind, the Whaup, dashing back the salt water from his eyes and mouth, and holding on to the prow, peered into the wild gloom ahead, and was near shouting joyously aloud from the mere excitement and madness of the chase. It was a race with the waves ; and the pinnacle rolled and staggered down in a drunken fashion into huge black depths only to rise clear again on the hissing masses of foam ; while wind and water alike—the black and riven sky, the plunging and foaming sea, and the great roaring gusts of the gale that came tearing up from the south—seemed sweeping onward for those dusky and jagged points which formed the nearest line of land.

Coquette was standing on deck, her one small hand clinging to the cold steel shrouds, while her face, terror-stricken and anxious, was fixed on the blackness of the storm that raged outside the troubled stillness of the harbour. Lord Earlishope begged her to go below from the fierce torrents of the rain ; and when she paid no heed to him, he brought a heavy mantle, and covered her with it from head to foot. She spoke not a word ; and only trembled slightly when the wind came in with a fierce cry from that angry warring of the elements that was going on beyond the islands.

The darkness fell fast ; and yet as far as they could see there was no speck of a boat coming in from the wild and moving waste of grey. To the girl standing there and gazing out, it appeared as though the horizon of the other world—that mystic margin on which, in calmer moments, we seem to see the phantoms of those who have been taken from us passing in a mournful procession, speechless and cold-eyed, giving to us no sign of recognition—had come close and near, and might have withdrawn behind its shadowy folds all the traces of life which the sea held. Could it be that the black fall of death had fallen just beyond those gloomy islands, and hidden for ever from mortal eyes that handful of anxious men who had lately been struggling towards the shore ? Was the bright young existence she had grown familiar with,

and almost learned to love, now snatched away without one mute pressure of the hand to say farewell? She stood there as if in a dream; and the things that passed before her eyes had become spectral and ghastly. She scarcely knew that she heard voices. She clung to the steel ropes—there was something like a faint “hurrah!” wafted in with the tumult of the sea—there was the vision of a face gleaming red and joyous with the salt spray and the rain—and then she knew that she was sinking, with a sound as of the sea closing over her head.

CHAPTER XXI.

COQUETTE IS TROUBLED.

THE gale blew hard all that evening; but towards midnight the sky cleared; and the large white moon rose wild and swift into the luminous violet vault, that was still crossed by ragged streaks of grey cloud hurrying over from the sea. All along the dark islands the mournful wash of the waves could be heard; and here, in the quiet of the bay, the wind brought a fresh and salt flavour with it, as it blew in gusts about, and swept onward to stir the birches and brackens of the hills. The Whaup sat up on deck with Lord Earlshope, who was smoking; and they spoke in undertones, for all was quiet below.

“You will get to Oban to-morrow?” asked the Whaup, after some profound meditation.

“I hope so,” said Earlshope.

“I shall leave you then, and go back by coach or steamer.”

“Has your adventure of this afternoon frightened you?”

“Faith, no! My only fright was when my cousin fainted; and I wished, when I saw that, that every guillemot that ever lived was at the bottom of the sea. But I am getting sick of idleness.”

Earlshope laughed.

“You may laugh,” said the Whaup; “but it is true. You have earned the right to be idle, because you are a man. For a young fellow like me, with all the world before him, it is miserable to be dawdling away time, you know.”

"I quite agree with you," said his companion ; "but it seems to me this discovery has come upon you rather suddenly."

"All the more reason," returned the Whaup with confidence, "that it should be acted upon forthwith. I am going to Glasgow. I shall live in lodgings with some fellows I know, and work up my studies for the next session. There is a tremendous deal of work in me, although you might not think it, and I may not see Airie for two years."

"Why so ?"

"Because then I shall be nearer twenty-one than twenty."

"And what will you do then ?"

"What shall I do then ? Who knows ?" said the Whaup, absently.

Next morning the weather was fine, and the wind had calmed. The sea was of a troubled, dark, and shining blue ; the far hills of the islands were of a soft and velvet-like brown, with here and there a tinge of red or saffron. The *Caroline* was soon got under weigh, and began to open out the successive headlands and bays as she stood away towards the north.

Coquette came on deck, and looked out on the sea with an involuntary shudder. Then she turned to find the Whaup regarding her with rather a serious and thoughtful look.

"Ah, you wicked boy, to make me so fearful yesterday evening !" she said.

"But you are quite well this morning ?" he asked, anxiously.

"Oh, yes, I am quite well," she said ; and the brightness of her face and of her soft dark eyes was sufficient evidence.

"And I got you the guillemot after all," said the Whaup, with some pride. "One of the sailors is preparing both the breast and the pinions for you, and you can wear either you like."

"For your sake, when you are away in Glasgow," she said with a smile. "I did hear what you said last night to Lord Earlshope. I could not sleep with thinking of the black water, and the wind, and the cry of the waves. And will you go away from us now altogether ?"

"I must go away sooner or later," said the Whaup.

"But it is a little time until we all go back. Your father, he cannot remain long."

"But I have become restless," said the Whaup, with some impatience.

"And you are anxious to go away?" said Coquette. "It is no compliment to us; but no, I will not speak like that to you. I do think you are right to go. I will hear of you in Glasgow; I will think of you every day; and you will work hard, just as if I could see you and praise you for doing it. Then, you know, some day a long way off, it may be a rainy morning at Airlie, or perhaps even a bright day, and we shall see you come driving up in the dog-cart——"

"Just as you came driving up a few months ago. Does it not seem a long time since then?"

"Yes, a long time," said Coquette; "but I do think this is the best part of it."

The attention of everybody on deck was at this moment directed to the strange currents through which the *Caroline* had now to force herself—long stretches and swirls in an almost smooth sea, with here and there a boiling-up into a miniature whirlpool of the circling waters. These powerful eddies, their outline marked by streaks of foam, caught the bow of the yacht, and swung it this way or that with a force which threatened to jibe the sails; while now and again she would come to a dead stop, as though the sea were of lead. Far away on their left, between the misty hills of Jura and Scarba, lay the treacherous Corryvreckan, dreaded of fishermen; and they knew that those glassy swirls around them were but the outlying posts and pickets of the racing and channelled tides. But slowly and steadily the *Caroline* made head through the fierce currents, drawing away from the still breadth of Loch Shuna, and getting further into Scarba Sound, with the desolate island of Luing on the right. How strangely silent lay the long, lone bays and the solitary stretches of shore in the sunlight! There was no sign of life abroad save the hovering in mid-air of the white gannet, or the far and rapid flight of a string of wild ducks sinking down towards the south. But as they drew near the mouth of Scarba Sound—with the great stretch of the Frith of Lorn opening up and the mighty shoulders of the Mull mountains rising faint and grey in the north-west—the solitude grew less absolute. Here and there a boat became

visible. They came in sight of the slate-quarries of Easdale. Then a long streak of smoke beyond told them that the great steamer from the North was coming down with her cargo of English tourists from the hills and lochs of Inverness.

They were all on deck when the steamer passed ; and doubtless the people who crowded the larger vessel may have regarded the little group in the stern of the yacht as sufficiently picturesque—the tall and grey-haired lady, who had her hand inside the arm of the young girl ; the elderly Minister, looking grave and dignified ; Lord Earlshope, seated carelessly on one of the skylights ; the Whaup waving a handkerchief in reply to several signals of the same kind.

“To-morrow morning,” said the Whaup to Lady Drum, “I shall be on board that steamer, going straight down for Crinan ; and you—you will be off for Skye, I suppose, or Stornoway, or Cape Wrath ?”

“What do you mean ?” said his father.

“Has nobody told you ? I am going back to Airrie to-morrow, and on to Glasgow, to prepare for the classes. I have had enough idling.”

“I am glad to hear it,” said the Minister, in a tone which did not betray any strong assurance that the Whaup was to be trusted in these his new resolves.

But Coquette believed him. All the rest of that day, as the *Caroline* glided through the dark-blue waters—on past Ardencaple Point and Barnacaryn, under the steep crags at the mouth of Loch Feochan, and through the Sound of Kerrera, until she was nearing the calm expanse of Oban Bay—the Whaup perceived that his cousin was almost elaborately kind and attentive to him, and far more serious and thoughtful than was her wont. He himself was a trifle depressed. Having definitely stated his intentions, he would not show weakness at the last moment, and draw back from his promised word ; but it was with rather a heavy heart that he went below to gather together his books and put them in order for the last time on board.

“I think I shall sleep on shore to-night,” said he, when he reappeared.

“Why ?” asked Coquette.

"Because I don't wish to have you all up by seven to-morrow morning. The boat leaves at eight."

"And must we not see you off, and say good-bye?"

"What's the use?" said the Whaup.

Coquette put her hand on his arm, and said, rather shyly :

"I think you would rather come with us. Why not do that? It is very sad and miserable your going all away back by yourself, and I am sorry to think of it, far more for you than if it were for myself. It is very hard lines."

The Whaup laughed in spite of his wretchedness.

"I told you ever so long ago not to say that," he said, "and you promised to remember. Never mind. It's very good of you to concern yourself about me; but I mean to go to-morrow morning. And look there!—there is Oban."

"I do hate the place!" said Coquette, petulantly.

She would scarcely look at the semicircle of white houses stretching round the bay, nor yet at the hills and the scattered villas, nor yet at the brown and desolate old castle built high on the point beyond.

"It is a town," she said, "that row of bare and ugly houses, and the hotels, and the shops. It is not fit for these Highland mountains; it shames them to look down on it—it is so—so dirty-white and shabby."

"What ails ye at the town?" said Lady Drum, who did not like to hear her favourite Oban disparaged.

"A little while ago you would have found Oban quite a grand place," said Lord Earlshope—"quite a gay and fashionable place."

"Fashionable!" said Coquette, with that slight elevation of the eyebrows and the almost imperceptible shrug to which they had all got accustomed. "Fashionable! Perhaps. It is a good promenade before the grocers' shops; and do the ladies who make the fashions live in those dirty-white houses? What is it that they say?—*Qui n'est pas difficile, trouve bientôt un asile.*"

"You know the other French proverb?" said Lord Earlshope—" *Jeune femme, pain tendre, et bois vert, mettent la maison en désert.*"

"That is possible," said Coquette, "but it is not fashion. You should see Biarritz, Lady Drum, with its sands, and the

people, and the music, and the Bay of Biscay, and the Spanish mountains not far. Even I think our little Le Croisic better, where mamma and I lived at the *Etablissement*. But as for this town here, if it is more pleasant-looking than Ardrossan, I will blow me tight ! ”

The Whaup shrieked with laughter ; and Coquette looked puzzled, knowing she had made some dreadful blunder, but not very certain what it was. Lady Drum rescued her from confusion by carrying her off to dress for dinner, and explained to her in their common state-room that she must be careful not to repeat colloquialisms which she had overheard without being quite sure of their propriety. Indeed, when the meaning of the phrase was explained to her, she laughed as much as the Whaup had done, and entered the saloon, where the gentlemen were waiting, with a conscious look on her face which considerably heightened its colour.

“ It was you to blame,” she said to the Whaup ; “ I did often hear you say that.”

“ *Propria que maribus*,” said he, and they sat down to dinner.

It was felt to be a farewell celebration. The Whaup looked grave and determined—as if he feared he would be moved from his resolution. Coquette stole furtive glances at him ; and wondered what she could give him to take with him as a keepsake. The Minister furnished him with directions about certain things to be done at Airlie ; Lady Drum made him promise to come and see her when she went to Glasgow ; and Lord Earlshope persuaded him to remain on board that night and go ashore in the morning.

When they went on deck after dinner, it was a beautiful clear night, with an almost full moon throwing a flood of silver across the bay from over the dusky island of Kerrera. Above the town the shoulders of the hills were touched with a pale and sombre grey ; but a keener light shone along the white fronts of the houses close by the shore ; while nearer at hand it touched the masts and rigging of the various craft, and threw sharp black shadows on the deck of the *Caroline*.

“ Where is Miss Cassilis ? ” said Lady Drum, when she had taken her accustomed seat.

At the same moment they heard the first soft notes of the harmonium ; and presently there rose into the still night

the clear, and sweet, and melancholy cadence of Mendelssohn's gondola-song. The empty silence of the bay seemed to grow full of this rich and harmonious music ; until one scarcely knew that the sounds were coming from the open cabin skylight which gleamed an oblong patch of yellow fire in the dusk. The night seemed to be as full of music as of moonlight ; it was in the air all around ; it was a part of the splendour of the sky, and scarcely to be distinguished from the lapping of the water along the side of the boat. But suddenly she changed the key, and with sharp and powerful chords struck out the proud and ringing melody of "Drumlog." The old Scotch psalm-tune stirred the Whaup, as a trumpet might stir the heart of a dragoon. He rose to his feet, and drew a long breath, as if the plaintive gondola-music had been stifling him.

"What a grand tune that Drumlog is," he said. "It means business. I dare say the old troopers sang it with their teeth set hard, and their hand on their musket-barrels. But did you ever hear it played like that ?"

"It is wonderful—wonderful !" said the Minister, with his sad, grey eyes fixed upon the moonlit sea, under the shadows of the lonely island.

You should have seen the Whaup the next morning, bustling about with a determined air, and making, from time to time, a feeble effort to whistle. Coquette had been up before any one on board, and now sat, mute and pale, watching his preparations. Sometimes she turned to look towards the quay, where the vessels lay under the yellow and misty sunlight of the autumn morning.

Then the great steamer came round the point. The Whaup jumped into the gig after having shaken hands with everybody and the boat was pushed off.

"Stop a moment," said Coquette, "I do wish to go with you to the steamer."

So she, also, got into the boat ; and together they went in to the quay, and got ashore. The steamer arrived, and the Whaup—still trying at times to whistle—went on board. The first bell was rung.

"Good-bye," said Coquette, holding one of his hands in both of hers. "You will write to me often, often ; and

when I go back to Airlie I will write to you every week, and tell you what is going on with all the people—even with Leesiebess also. And I will go to see you at Glasgow, if you will not come to Airlie before you have become a great man.”

A few minutes afterwards the Whaup was waving his handkerchief to her as the steamer steamed away down the Sound of Kerrera; and Coquette stood on the quay, looking wistfully after the boat, even until the clouds of smoke had become a luminous brown in the morning sunlight.

CHAPTER XXII.

ON THE SEASHORE.

“I WISH to speak to you of a great secret,” said Coquette to Lord Earlshope that morning, “when we shall have the chance. It is very important.”

“I shall remember to make the chance,” said he, “especially as Lady Drum wants to go round and see Dunstaffnage. You must come with us.”

The Minister preferred to remain in the yacht. The fact is, he was composing a sermon on the judgment that befell Jonah; and was engaged in painting a picture of the storm, with powerful colours borrowed from his experiences in Loch Crinan. He was busy with the task; for he hoped to be able to preach the sermon next day—being Sunday—to the small congregation on board. So it was that the others started without him; and drove over in a hired trap by the road which leads past the small Lochan-dhu. In time they arrived at Dunstaffnage, and made their way out to the rocks which there rise over the sea, looking across to Lismore, and Morven, and Kingairloch.

Lady Drum was a brisk and active woman for her age; but she did not care to exert herself unnecessarily. When they had gone up and examined the ruins of the old castle, when they had passed through the small wood, and reached the line of alternate rock and beach fronting the sea, she placed herself upon an elevated peak, and allowed the

younger folks to scramble down to the white shingle below. There she saw them both sit down—Lord Earlshope beginning to pitch pebbles carelessly into the sea. She could hear the murmur of their talk, too ; but could not distinguish what they said. Apparently there was nothing very important engaging their attention ; for they did not even look at each other ; and Lord Earlshope was evidently more interested in trying to hit a piece of seaweed which the tide had drifted in to the strand.

“My secret is this,” said Coquette. “Do you know that papa and mamma did leave me a good deal of money ?”

“I was not aware of it,” said Lord Earlshope, making another effort to hit the seaweed.

“Oh, I am very rich—that is to say, not what you English would call rich, but rich in my country. Yet I cannot use the money. What good is it to me ? Mamma gave me more jewellery than I need—what am I to do with my money ?”

“I don’t know much about ladies’ expenses,” said Earlshope. “But if you want to get rid of this burden of wealth, why not keep horses, or buy a theatre, or——”

“No, no, no,” she said. “You do not understand. I mean I have nothing to do with my money for myself. Now, here is my cousin who goes to Glasgow to live by himself in lodgings, perhaps not very pleasant. His father is not rich. He must work hard ; and your northern winters are so cold. Very well : how I am to give him money ?”

“That is the problem—is it ?” said Earlshope. “I might have guessed you did not wish to spend the money on yourself. Well, I don’t know. I give it up. If he were a mere lad, you see, you might send him a 20*l.* note now and again, which most of us have found very acceptable at college. But you would insult your cousin if you sent him money bluntly like that. Besides, you would destroy the picturesqueness of his position. Our Scotch colleges are sacred to the poor student ; they are not seminaries for the teaching of extravagance and good manners, like the English universities.”

“Then you cannot help me ?” said Coquette.

"Oh, there are a hundred indirect ways in which you could be of service to him ; but you must be careful, and consult with Lady Drum, who is going to Glasgow, and will probably see him there. How fortunate you are to have no care whatever on your mind but the thought of how to do other people good ! You are never anxious about yourself ; you seem to be surrounded by a sort of halo of comfort and satisfaction ; and annoyances that strike against the charmed circle are blunted and fall to the ground."

"That is a very nice and pretty speech," said Coquette, with a smile. "I will soon believe the English are not a barbarous nation if you make such long compliments."

"I wonder," said Lord Earlshope, looking away over the sea, and apparently almost talking to himself, "whether, if I were to tell you another secret, it would annoy you in the least. I do not think it would. How could it matter to you ?"

"But what is it ?" said Coquette.

"Suppose," said he, throwing another pebble at the bit of seaweed, "that I were to tell you, first, that you had no need to be alarmed ; that I did not mean to frighten you with a proposal, or any nonsense of that kind ; and then tell you that I had fallen in love with you ? Suppose I were to do that, and tell you the history of the thing, it would not trouble you in the least, would it ? Why should it, indeed ? You are not responsible ; you are not affected by the catastrophe ; you might be curious to know more about it, even, as something to pass the time."

He spoke with the most absolute indifference ; and so pre-occupied was he that he did not even look at his companion. The first start of surprise had given way to a mute and apprehensive fear ; her face was quite pale ; and she did not know that her two hands were tightly clasped in her lap, as if to keep them from trembling.

"Such is the fact, however," he continued, just as if he were describing to her some event of yesterday, of which he had been an interested spectator. "You cannot be nearly so surprised as I am ; indeed, I don't suppose you would think anything about it, unless you considered it as a misfortune which has happened to me ; and then you will, I hope without laughing, give me the benefit of your sympathy."

Yet I am not very wretched, you see ; and you—you are no more affected by it than if you were the moon, and I, according to the Eastern saying, one of the hundred streams looking up to you. I am afraid I have been experimenting on myself, and deserve the blow that has fallen. I have been flying my kite too near the thunder-cloud ; and what business had a man of my age with a kite ? ”

He spoke without any bitterness. It was a misfortune, and to be accepted.

“ I am very sorry,” she said, in a low voice.

“ No !—why sorry ? ” he said. “ I fancied I was more philosophical than I am. I think my first sentiment towards you was merely idle curiosity. I wished to see how so rare an exotic would flourish when transplanted to our bleak Scotch moors. Then you allowed me to make your acquaintance ; and I believed myself filled with the most paternal solicitude about your welfare. Sometimes I had doubts—sometimes I made experiments to solve them. If I were to tell you how I fought against the certainty that I had become the victim of an affection, foolish, hopeless, unreasoning, you would, perhaps, understand why I think it better to tell you frankly so much as I have done, by way of explanation. You might also be amused, perhaps, if you cared for recondite studies. To me it has been very odd to find that, after I had dissected every sensation and analysed every scrap of emotion I have ever experienced, another being has sprung into existence by the very side of my lecture-table. That other being is also I—looking with contempt at my own anatomical experiments. And there is yet a third I—now talking to you—who looks as a spectator upon both the anatomist and the spectral being who has escaped his knife. Do you understand all this ? ”

A stone fell close beside them ; and Coquette’s heart leaped at the sound. It had been pitched down by Lady Drum as a signal that she was impatient.

“ Yes, I understand it all,” said Coquette, still in the same low voice, “ but it is very dreadful.”

“ Then it is not amusing,” said Lord Earlschope, offering his hand to raise her up. “ I beg your pardon for boring you with a psychological conundrum. You are not vexed about my having mentioned it at all ? ”

"Oh, no," said Coquette ; but the beach, and the sea, and the far mountains, seemed insecure and wavering ; and she would fain have had Lady Drum's arm to lean upon.

"How could you be vexed, indeed, except by the dulness of the story ?" said Lord Earlshope, cheerfully. "You may consider, if you like, that you never heard my confession. It cannot affect you ; nor need it, indeed, in the slightest degree, affect our relations with each other. Do you agree with me ?"

"*Oui*—yes, I mean—it will be quite the same between us as before," said Coquette.

"You will not find me torture you with the jealousies of a lover. I shall not scowl when you write a letter without showing me the address. I shall not even be angry if you enclose flowers in it. We shall be to each other, I hope, the friends we have always been ; until I have quite recovered my equanimity. And you will not make me the butt of your ridicule during the process ?"

"I shall always be very sorry that this has happened," said Coquette.

"Why, of course !" said her companion. "Didn't I say so ? You are sorry, because it is my misfortune. In return, when you fall in love—perhaps with your handsome cousin, let us say, who means, I know, to come back crowned with laurels in order to win for himself a pretty wife somewhere down in Ayrshire—I will do my best to become sorry for you. But then, in your case, why should anybody be sorry ? To fall in love is not always a misfortune—at least, I hope there are some who do not find it so."

For the first time he spoke sadly ; and the expression of his face conveyed that he was thinking of some distant time. When Coquette and her companion rejoined Lady Drum, they were both unusually silent. As for the young girl, indeed, she was anxious to get once more into the waggonette, and have the horses' heads turned towards Oban. In the rumble of the wheels along the road there was not much occasion to talk ; and very little indeed of the beautiful scenery, on that calm and bright autumn morning, did Coquette see as they passed over the neck of land towards Oban Bay.

CHAPTER XXIII.

COQUETTE BEGINS TO FEAR.

"UNCLE," said Coquette, directly they had returned to the yacht, "when shall we go back to Airlie?"

The Minister looked up in a surprised and dazed way from his MSS., and said—

"Go back?—yes—I have been thinking of that too—for it is not fitting that one should be away from the duties to which one has been called. But you—don't you understand that it is for your sake we are here? Are you so much better? What does Lady Drum say?"

The Minister had now so far recalled himself from the sermon on Jonah that he could attentively scan his niece's face.

"Why," said he, "you are more pale—more languid—now than I have seen you for many days. Will not a little more of the sea-air make you feel strong?"

"I am not unwell," said Coquette, with the same air of restraint; "but if it will please you to go farther with the yacht, then I will go too."

So she went away to her own cabin, fearing to go on deck and meet Lord Earlshope. In their common state-room she encountered Lady Drum.

"You two were deeply occupied," she said, with a grave and kindly smile, "when ye forgathered on the beach."

"Yes," said Coquette, with an anxious haste, "I did speak to Lord Earlshope about my cousin in Glasgow."

"It must have been an interesting subject, for ye never took your eyes from watching the toe of your boot, which was peeping from under your dress; and he, I am sure, would not have noticed a man-of-war had it come round the point. Dear, dear me! I willna scold you; but to come so soon, ye know, after your poor cousin left ye——"

"No, no, no!" said Coquette, hurriedly, as she took her friend's hand in hers; "you must not talk like that. You do not know that I have just been to my uncle to ask him to go home."

Lady Drum began to look more serious. She had been

bantering the young girl in the fashion that most elderly people love ; but she had no idea that she was actually hitting the mark. This sudden wish on the part of Coquette to return to Airlic—what could it mean ? Considerably startled, the old lady saw for the first time that there was real danger ahead ; and she asked Coquette to sit down and have a talk with her, in a voice so solemn that Coquette was alarmed, and refused.

“No,” she said, “I will not talk. It is nothing. You imagine more than is true. All that I wish is to leave this voyage when it pleases you and my uncle.”

But Lady Drum was not to be gainsaid ; she felt it to be her duty to warn Coquette. Lord Earlshope, she said, was a man whom it was necessary to understand. He had been accustomed to luxurious indolence all his days, and might drift into a position which would compromise more than himself. He had a dangerous habit of regarding himself as a study, and experimenting on himself, without reflecting that others might suffer. Then, again, he had so resolutely avoided introductions to rich and charming young ladies who had visited Castle Cawmil, that she—Lady Drum—was convinced he had some rooted aversion to the consideration of marriage—that he would never marry.

“Have ye never heard him talk about marriage, and the mistakes that young men make ? He is as bitter about that as if he was an old man of sixty, or as if he had made a foolish marriage himself. Perhaps he has,” she continued, with a smile ; “but his success in concealing it all these years must be a credit to him.”

“All that does not concern me,” said Coquette, with a sort of piteous deprecation in her tone. “Why do you speak to me about Lord Earlshope’s marriage ? I do not care if he has been in fifty marriages.”

“Will you tell me why you are suddenly anxious to go home ?” said Lady Drum, bending her grave and kind eyes upon the girl.

“I have told you,” said Coquette, with a touch of *hauteur* in her voice, as she turned abruptly away and walked out.

She stood at the foot of the companion-steps. Which way should she choose ? Overhead she heard Lord

Earlshope talking to the skipper, who was getting the yacht under canvas to resume the voyage. In the saloon sat her uncle, deep in the intricacies of Scotch theology. Behind her was the elderly lady from whom she had just broken away with a gesture of indignant pride. For a minute or two she remained irresolute, though the firmness of her lips showed that she was still smarting from what she had considered an unwarrantable interference. Then she went gently back to the state-room door, opened it, walked over to where Lady Drum sat, and knelt down penitently and put her head in her lap.

"I hope you are not angry or offended with me," she said, in a low voice. "I am very sorry. I would tell you what you ask, but it is not my secret, Lady Drum ; I must not, indeed, tell you. It is because you are so good a friend that you ask ; but—but—but it is no matter ; and will you help me to go back soon to Airlie ? "

"Help you ?—yes, I will," said Lady Drum, in the same kindly way, although it was but natural she should feel a little hurt at having her curiosity baffled. She put her hand in a gracious and stately fashion on the young girl's head, and said : "You have a right to keep your own secrets if you choose ; far be it from me to ask you to give them up. But should you want to confide in a person who has some experience o' life, and is anxious to do ye every service, you have but to come to me."

"Oh, I am sure of that," said Coquette, gratefully. "I will be as your own daughter to you."

"And about this going back," continued Lady Drum. "It would look strange to turn at this point, just after letting your cousin go home by himself. We shall have the best part o' the thing over in a couple o' days, when we get up to Skye ; and then, if ye like, we can go back by the steamer."

"Two more days !" said Coquette, almost wildly, as she started to her feet—"two more days ! How can I bear——"

She caught herself up and was silent.

"There is something in all this that ye keep back," said Lady Drum. "I do not blame ye ; but when it suits ye to be more frank wi' me ye will no find yourself wi' a backward

friend. Now we will go upon the deck and see what's to the fore."

Coquette was glad to go on deck under this safe-conduct. Yet what had she to fear? Lord Earlshope had made a certain communication to her with the obvious belief that she would treat it as a matter of no importance to herself. Was she not, according to his own account, surrounded by a halo of self-content which made her independent of the troubles which afflicted others?

"But I am not selfish," she had bitterly thought to herself as they were driving back to Oban. "Why should he think I have no more feeling than a statue or a picture? Is it that the people of this country do not understand it if you are comfortable and careless for the moment?"

When they now went on deck Lord Earlshope came forward as though he had utterly forgotten that conversation on the beach at Dunstaffnage, and placed Coquette and her companion in a position so that they could see the bay, and the houses, and the rocks of Dunolly, which they were now leaving behind. Coquette bade good-bye to Oban with but little regret. Perhaps she was chiefly thinking that in a few minutes they would come in sight of that curved indentation of the coast which would remind Lord Earlshope of what had happened there. And, indeed, as they stood away over towards the Sound of Mull, with the dark mountains of Morven in the north, and the blue waters of the Atlantic stretching far into the south, they actually came in sight of those tiny bays which they had visited in the morning.

"Do you recognise the place?" asked Lord Earlshope, carelessly, of Lady Drum.

Then he turned to Coquette and bade her admire the beautiful and soft colours of the Morven hills, where the sunlight brought out the warm tints of the rusty bracken and the heather, through the pearly grey of the mist and the heat.

"It is very lonely," said Coquette, looking wistfully round the far shores; "I do not see any sign of life among those mountains or near the sea."

"You would not enjoy a long visit to these places," said Earlshope, with a smile. "I imagine that the constant

sight of the loneliness of the mountains would make you miserable. Does not the sea look sad to you? I have fancied I noticed a sense of relief on your face when we have settled down in the evening to a comfortable chat in the saloon, and have shut out for the night the water, and the solitary hills, and the sky."

She did not answer; nor could she understand how he spoke to her thus, with absolute freedom of tone and manner. Had she dreamed all that had happened under the ruined walls of Dunstaffnage? She only knew that he was looking at her with his accustomed look of mingled curiosity and interest; and that he was, as usual, telling her of his speculations as regarded herself. Or was he only assuming this ease of manner to dissipate her fears and restore their old relations? Was he only feigning indifference in order to remove her constraint?

It was not until the afternoon, when they had gone up through the Sound of Mull, and were drawing near to their anchorage in Tobermory Bay, that he had an opportunity of speaking to her alone. Lady Drum had gone below, and Coquette suddenly found herself defenceless.

"Come, Miss Cassilis," he said, "have it out with me now. You have been avoiding me all day, to punish me for my foolish disclosure of this morning. Is that the case? Did I commit a blunder? If I did, you must pardon me; I did not fancy you would have wasted a second thought on the matter. And, indeed, I cannot afford to have you vexed by my indiscretion; it is not natural for you to look vexed."

"If I am vexed," she said, looking down, and yet speaking rather warmly, "it is to hear you speak of me so. You do seem to think me incapable of caring for any one but myself; you think I should not be human; not interested in my friends, but always thinking of myself; always pleased; always with one look, like a picture. It is not true. I am grieved when my friends are grieved—I cannot be satisfied and pleased when they are in trouble."

"Surely you have no need to tell me that," he said. "When your face is clouded with cares, I know they are not your cares, and that you are far too ready to accept the burden of other people's worries. But I maintain you have no right to do so. It is your business—your duty—to be

pleased, satisfied, contented ; to make other people happy by looking at your happiness. It is natural to you to be happy. Why, then, should you for a moment suffer yourself to be annoyed by what I told you this morning ? I see I made a mistake. You must forget it. I fancied I might talk to you about it without its troubling you more than the looking at a new vessel on the horizon would trouble you——”

“ And you believe me, therefore,” she said, with some indignation in her voice, “ a mere doll—a baby—incapable of understanding the real human anxieties around me ? Perhaps you are right. Perhaps I do not care for anything but my own pleasure ; but it is not flattery to tell me so.”

With that she walked away from him and rejoined Lady Drum, who had again come on deck. Earlshope had no further chance of speaking a word to her. At dinner, in the evening, Coquette was silent, and her face was downcast and troubled. When she spoke, it was to Lady Drum, towards whom she was obediently and almost piteously attentive.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TOUCHING CERTAIN PROBLEMS.

VERY singular in appearance was the small congregation grouped on the deck of the *Caroline*, to listen to Mr. Cassilis's sermon, on that quiet Sunday morning. The Minister himself stood erect and firm, with his grey hair—for he was bare-headed—and his sunken face touched with the early sunlight. Almost at his feet sat Lady Drum and Coquette, the latter sometimes wistfully looking away over the calm sea, towards the distant shores of Loch Sunart. Lord Earlshope sat by himself still farther aft, where he could catch the outline of Coquette's face as she turned to regard the Minister. And then forward were the sailors, a small group of bronzed and sturdy men, lying about in a listless and picturesque fashion, with their scarlet caps gleaming in the sun. The background was the smooth waters of the bay, with a faint blue smoke rising into the still air from over the scattered houses of Tobermory.

Coquette had begged hard to be allowed to preface or assist the service with her harmonium ; but her prayer was explicitly refused. Indeed, there might not have been much in the music to accord with the stern and matter-of-fact exhortation which the Minister had prepared. It is true that, as he warmed to his subject, he indulged in the rare license of breaking away from his preconceived plan of argument and illustration. He was dealing with things which were now before his eyes ; and, as his rude and homely eloquence became more and more touched with enthusiasm, it seemed as though the inspiration of the sea had fallen on him. "What meanest thou, O sleeper !" was his text ; and the cry with which the sailors awakened Jonah seemed the Minister's own cry to the men who now lived along these lonely coasts. Indeed, there was a singular and forcible realism about the address which surprised Coquette ; it was so different from the long and weary sermons on doctrine to which she had of late been accustomed. The Minister had borrowed all his imagery from his recent experiences. He described the storm—the rushing of the water—the gloom of the hills—the creaking of cordage—until you could have fancied that Jonah was actually trying to make for Crinan Bay. The sailors were thoroughly aroused and interested. It was to them a thrilling and powerful narrative of something that had actually happened ; something a hundred times more real and human than the vague stories and legends of the Western Isles—those faintly-coloured and beautiful things that happened so far away and so long ago that the sound of them now is like the sound of a sea-shell.

Of course there came the application, which was equally practical, if less picturesque. The fishermen, who were now lazily lying on the grassy slopes above the Tobermory cottages—satisfied with the drowsy warmth and the sensation of rest ; the sailors themselves, who were busy from day to day with the mysteries of the elements, fighting with the accidents of the present world, regarding only the visible horizon around them—they were but as sleepers asleep in a storm. For outside of this visible horizon lay another and more mysterious horizon, which was daily drawing closer to them, bearing with it the doom of humanity. Hour by hour

the world was being narrowed by this approaching bank of cloud ; and when at last it burst, and the lightning of death gleamed out from its sombre shadows, would there then be time to seek for the Jonah who must be thrown overboard ? The old man, with his bared head and his eager manner, seemed himself a prophet sent up to denounce Nineveh and all her iniquities ; and so impressive and resonant was his voice—heard over the strange calm of the sea—that more than one of the sailors had unconsciously turned to gaze far out towards the horizon, as though expecting to find there the gathering storm-clouds of which he spoke.

After this forenoon service had been finished, a dilemma occurred. The Minister had been furnished with no rules for the observance of the Sabbath on board a vessel. He had no precedents for his guidance. He could not simply request everybody to come indoors and take a book. Coquette, indeed, resolutely remained on deck.

“Well,” said Lady Drum, “we are out o’ doors as much as we can be, and it would be no worse, surely, if we were walking along the street yonder.”

Not even Lord Earlshope had thought of continuing their voyage ; that was a thing which, on the face of it, could not be permitted. But when the Minister was confronted by the difficulty which Lady Drum had discovered, he did not know well what to do. He was averse to their going ashore and walking about on the Sabbath morning, to the scandal of all decent folk ; on the other hand, there was little difference between that and sitting on deck to look at the sea and the houses ; while going below and immuring themselves all day long was out of the question. At last his natural good sense triumphed. He gave his consent to their leaving the boat for a certain time—in fact, until the hour for afternoon service on deck, if they chose ; but he would remain on board.

“You will come ashore, will you not ?” said Lord Earlshope to Coquette.

“No ; I wish to remain with my uncle,” said Coquette, hurriedly.

“Nonsense, nonsense !” said Lady Drum. “Would you have an old woman like me stravaiging about the shore by myself ?”

"But Lord Earlshope will go with you," said Coquette, timidly.

"That does not matter. He is no companion for me ; so get on your hat and come away at once."

Coquette did so, and got into the gig, determined to cling closely to Lady Drum's side. As they neared the shore, the latter remarked that the village seemed quite deserted.

"The fishermen spend their Sundays either indoors or up on the hills," said Lord Earlshope. "I believe the married ones prefer the hills."

Perhaps that haphazard allusion to marriage remained in his mind ; for, after they had landed and walked some distance round the shore, until they discovered a pleasant place from which to sit and watch the seabirds over the Sound, he said, rather indolently—

"I wonder how many of those poor men have a pleasant home to return to after the fatigue and discomfort of a night out at the fishing."

As this was a problem which neither of the ladies with him could readily solve, the only answer was the splashing of the clear sea-water on the stones. Presently he said, in the same careless way—

"Do you know, Lady Drum, that physiologists say we become quite different people every seven years ? Don't look surprised—I am going to explain. They say that every atom and every particle of us have in that time been used up and replaced ; so that we are not the same persons we were seven years before. It is but natural to suppose that the mind changes with the body, if not so completely. You, for example, must find that you have not the same opinions on many subjects that you had seven years ago. And in the case of young people especially, they do positively and actually change the whole of their mental and physical structure in even less time than that. You follow this introductory discourse ? " he added, with a laugh.

"Quite," said the elderly lady, "though I am no so sure it is a proper one for a Sabbath morning."

"You must hear me out, and with attention. The subject is profound. If I am a different person at the end of seven years, why should I be bound by promises I made when I was my former self ? "

"Mercy on us!" said Lady Drum. "Is it a riddle?"

"Yes. Shall I help you to solve it by an illustration? Suppose one of those sturdy young fishermen here, when he is a mere boy of nineteen—undeveloped and quite vacant as to experience—is induced to marry some woman who has a bad nature and a hideous temper. He is a fool, of course. But seven years afterwards he is not so great a fool; indeed he has become another person, according to the physiological theory; and suppose the new fisherman hates and abhors his wife—perceives the deformity of her character—is revolted by her instead of attracted to her. Now, why should he be bound by the promise of the former fisherman? Indeed, she, also, has become another woman. Why should the old marriage bind together these two new persons? It has gone away as the mark on your finger-nail goes away: they have outgrown it."

Lady Drum began to look alarmed; and Earlshope, catching sight of her face, smiled.

"No," he said; "don't imagine me a monster. I don't want to unmarry anybody; it is only a theory. Yet why shouldn't there be a Statute of Limitations with regard to other matters than money?"

"You mean," said Lady Drum, solemnly, "that I, Margaret Ainslie Drum, wife of Sir Peter of that name, am no longer a married woman, but free to marry whom I please?"

"Precisely," said Lord Earlshope, apparently with a sincere joy that she had so thoroughly understood his argument. "You might marry me, or anybody—according to the theory, you know."

"Yes—according to the theory," remarked Lady Drum, endeavouring to repress her virtuous wrath; "of course, according to the theory."

With that he fairly burst out laughing.

"I do believe I have shocked you," he said, "in my endeavour to find out an argument why that imaginary poor fisherman should be released from his bonds. It was only a joke, you know, Lady Drum; for of course one could not unsettle all the marriages in England merely to benefit one or two people. Yet it does seem hard that when a man is a fool and marries, then ceases to be a fool and wishes to

be free from his blunder, there is no hope for him. You don't seem to care to speculate about those matters, do you?" he added, carelessly, as he tried to twine two bits of grass. "Have you ever looked round the whole circle of your acquaintances, and wondered—supposing all present marriages were dissolved—what new combinations they would form in a week's time?"

"I confess," said Lady Drum, with some sarcasm, "that I have never amused myself in so ingenious a way. Pray, Lord Earlshope, what was it in Mr. Cassilis's sermon that provoked these meditations of yours?"

"Oh, they are not of recent date," said his lordship, with a fine indifference; "it is no new thing for me to discover that some of my friends would like to be unmarried. My notion of their right to do so is only a phantasy, of course, which is not to be taken *au sérieux*."

"I should think not," said Lady Drum, with some dignity.

Indeed, it was not until they had strolled along the shore some distance on their way back to the boat that the frown left her face. Her natural good sense, however, came to her aid, and showed her that Lord Earlshope had merely been amusing himself, as was his wont, with idle fancies. He could have nothing to gain personally by advancing dangerous propositions about the dissolution of marriage-bonds. What was it to him if all the fishermen in Tobermory, or in a dozen Tobermories, remained up on the hills during the Sundays in order to get away from their wives? So the grave and handsome face of the old lady gradually recovered its urbane and benignant expression; and she even ventured to rebuke Lord Earlshope, in a good-humoured way, about the inappropriate occasion he had chosen for his lecture on physiology.

Coquette had said nothing all this time. She walked by Lady Drum's side, with something of an absent look, not paying much attention to what was said. She seemed relieved to get into the gig again; so that Lady Drum expressed a hope that her duties of companion had not been irksome to her.

"Oh, no!" she said; "I am ready to go with you whenever you please"

But later on in the day they had another quiet chat to themselves, and Coquette became more confidential.

"I do not understand it ; there is something wrong in it, surely," she said, with a thoughtful look in her eyes, "when a young man like Lord Earlshope seems to have nothing more in the world to do—to have lost interest in everything—and at times to be gloomy and as if he were angry with the world. Have you not noticed it, Lady Drum ? Have you not seen it in his face when he is talking idly ? And then he says something in a bitter way, and laughs ; and it is not pleasant to hear. Why, he has lost interest in everything ! Why does he spend his time at home, reading books, and anxious to avoid seeing people ?"

Lady Drum regarded her with astonishment.

"Well, well," she said ; "who would have thought that those dreaming dark eyes of yours were studying people so accurately, and that beneath that knot of ribbon in your wild hair the oddest notions were being formed ? And what concern have ye wi' Lord Earlshope's idle habits, and his restlessness and dissatisfaction ?"

"I ?" said Coquette, calmly. "It is not my concern ; but it is sad to see a man whose existence is wasted—who has no longer any object in it."

"He enjoys life like other folk," said Lady Drum.

"He does not enjoy his life," said Coquette, with decision. "He is very polite, and does not intrude his troubles on any one. You might think he passed the time pleasantly—that he was content with his idleness. I do not believe it—no, I do believe there is not a more wretched man alive."

Lady Drum elevated her eyebrows. Instead of having one problem in humanity before her, she had now two. And why had this young lady taken so pathetic an interest in Lord Earlshope's wretchedness ?

CHAPTER XXV.

COQUETTE'S PRESENTIMENTS.

It was impossible that this condition of affairs could last. A far less observant man than Earlshope was bound to perceive the singular change which had fallen over Coquette's

manner. Hitherto she had appeared to him to be the very personification of joyousness—to live a graceful, happy, almost unthinking life, in an atmosphere of tender emotions and kindly sentiments, which were as the sunshine and the sea-breezes to her. Why should this young creature, with the calm and beautiful face, whose dark eyes showed a perfect serenity and placidity of soul, be visited with the rougher passions, the harsher experiences, which befall less fortunate people? That was not her *rôle*. It was her business to be happy—to be waited upon—to be pleased. She had but to sit on deck, in her French costume of dark-green tartan and black lace, with a book lying open but unread on her knee, with her hand inside Lady Drum's arm, with the clear light of the sea and the clouds shining in her face and in the darkness of her eyes, and leave troubles and cares and vexations to those born under a less fortunate star.

All that was over. Coquette was *distracte*, restless, miserable. The narrow limits of the yacht were a prison to her. She was silent and reserved, and seemed merely to wait with a resigned air for the end of the voyage. Had the Whaup been there, she would probably have entered into confidences with him, or even relieved the blank monotony by quarrelling with him. As it was, she listened to Lady Drum and Lord Earlshope talking, without adding a syllable to the conversation; and, while she dutifully waited on her uncle, and arranged his books and papers for him, she went about in a mute way, which he took as a kindly observance of his wish not to be disturbed during his hours of study.

"What has become o' your blithe spirits, Catherine?" he asked on the Monday morning as they were leaving Tobermory Bay. "I do not hear ye sing to yourself now? Yet I am told by Lady Drum that the voyage has done ye a world o' good."

"Oh, I am very well, uncle," she said, eagerly. "I am very well, indeed; and whenever you please to go back to Airlie, I shall be glad to go too."

"That is good news," said the Minister, cheerfully, "good news. And we maun see about getting home again; for I am anxious to hear how young Mr. Pettigrew acquitted himself yesterday, and I would fain hope there is no

dissension among my people this morning, such as the enemy is anxious to reap profit by.”

“Have you an enemy, uncle?” said Coquette.

“We have all an enemy,” answered the Minister, so impressively that his niece looked alarmed—“an enemy who is ever watchful to take advantage o’ our absence, or our thoughtlessness, who goeth about like a raging lion, seeking whom he may devour.”

“But is he in Airlie?” asked Coquette, who was still puzzled.

“Why, your uncle means the devil,” said Lady Drum, gaily, as she entered the saloon, “who is in Airlie as elsewhere—especially when there’s whisky afoot and the Pensioner is asked to bring out his fiddle. Come up the stairs, both o’ ye, and see the wonderfu’ places we are passing. I’m thinking we have got to the end o’ the lochs and the islands at last, and there is nothing left for us but to go straight out into the sea. I hope it’ll deal gently wi’ us,” added Lady Drum, with an involuntary shiver.

When they went on deck—Coquette keeping close by her uncle, as if she feared being addressed by a stranger—it was clear that the good weather which had so far accompanied them showed no signs of breaking. Over the blue western sea there was but the roughness of a slight breeze, which was only sufficient to fill the *Caroline’s* sails; while the jagged coast of the mainland, with the mountains of Ardnamurchan and Moidart, lay steeped in a faint mist under the morning sunlight.

Lord Earlshope was surprised to hear the Minister talk of returning immediately.

“We must, at all events, show Miss Cassilis the wonders of Loch Scavaig and Coruisk,” he said, “even though you should have to go over to-morrow to Broadford, and catch the steamer there. We shall make Loch Scavaig this evening if the wind holds.”

“I hope the wind will play no tricks with us,” said Lady Drum. “I shall never forget what I suffered in this very place when I first went to Skye many years ago—indeed, when Sir Peter and I were just married.”

“You might wait a couple of months without catching such a chance as we have to-day,” said Earlshope. “But

to return to this question of your stay. Don't you mean to visit the Spar Cave, and go up Glen Sligachan, and ascend the Quiraing?"

It was with a dull sense of pain that Coquette heard the reply. The Minister said there was no absolute hurry—that his niece would probably like to visit those wild and romantic scenes, of which she must have heard and read. Coquette accepted her fate mutely; but she took the opportunity of saying, a few minutes afterwards, to Lady Drum—

"I hope we shall not remain long in this place—this wild island. It must be horrible and ghastly, from what they say."

"It is the most desolate and awful place it is possible to imagine," said Lady Drum; "a place that reminds you o' a world that had long ago suffered a judgment-day, and been burnt up wi' fire. For days after I saw it first I used to dream about it—the black and still water and the twisted rocks, and the stillness. It would be fearfu' to be left alone there—at night—wi' the sound o' the burns running in the darkness."

Coquette shuddered.

"I will not go ashore," she said. "There is no reason for our going ashore, if we must return at once to Airlie."

So the day wore on, and the stately *Caroline*, with her bow coquettishly dipping to the waves, drew gradually away towards the north, passing the broad mouth of the Sound of Sleat, and coming in view of the tall cliffs of Canna, beyond the mountains of Rum Island. They were now close by the southern shores of Skye. Coquette became more and more disturbed. It seemed to her that she was being taken to some gloomy prison, from which no escape was possible. Lady Drum continued to describe the sombre and desolate appearance of the place they were going to, until these pictures produced the most profound effect on the girl's imagination. The *Caroline* seemed to go forward through the water with a relentless persistency; and Coquette, as the afternoon approached, and as she saw more and more clearly the dark outlines of the shores towards which they were tending, gave way to an unreasoning, despairing terror.

Lady Drum was amazed.

"You are not afraid o' rocks and water?" she said.

"Afraid of them? No," said the girl. "I am afraid of the place—I know not why—and of our remaining there. I would rather be away; I would rather be going back. It is a presentiment I have: I cannot understand it, but it makes me tremble."

"That is foolish," said Lady Drum. "You have not been yourself since your cousin left."

"I wish he were here now," murmured Coquette.

"He would laugh you out of your fears," said the elderly lady, in a cheerful way. "Come, rouse yourself up and dismiss those gloomy fancies of yours. We shall see you to-morrow on a little Highland pony, going round such precipices as are fit to take your breath away; and you will be as light-hearted and as careless as if you were in my drawing-room at Castle Cawmil with an open piano before you. By the way, you have not played us anything since your cousin left us at Oban."

"I cannot play just now," said Coquette, sitting calm and cold, with her eyes fixed with a vague apprehensiveness on the coast they were drawing near.

"What a strange creature you are," said Lady Drum, affectionately. "You are either all fire, and light, and sunshine, or as deep and morose as a well on a dark day. There is Lord Earlshope, who, I am certain, thinks he has offended you; and he keeps at a distance, and watches ye in a penitent fashion, as if he would give his ears to see you laugh again; I think I maun explain to him that it is no his fault——"

"No, no, no, Lady Drum!" exclaimed Coquette, in a low voice. "You must not speak to him."

"Hoity, toity! Is he to believe that I have quarrelled wi' him as well; and are we a' to put the man in irons in his own yacht?"

"Please don't tell him anything about me," pleaded Coquette.

"But look at him at this moment," said Lady Drum, with sudden compassion; "look at him up at the bow there—standing all by himself—without a human being taking notice o' him—looking helplessly at nothing, and

doubtless wondering whether he will get a word addressed to him at dinner. Is it fair, my young lady, to serve a man in that fashion in his own yacht ? ”

“ You may go and speak to him,” said Coquette, eagerly. “ Yes, you must speak to him—but not about me. He does not want to talk about me ; and you would only put wrong things into his head. Please go, Lady Drum, and talk to him.”

“ And what for should it rest on an old woman like me to amuse a young man ? What for am I to talk to him, and ye sitting here as mute and as mum as a mouse ? ”

“ Because—because——” said Coquette, with hesitation, “ because I think I am afraid of this island. I am not angry with him—with anybody—but I—I——. Oh, Lady Drum ! ” she suddenly exclaimed, “ won’t you persuade them to come away from this place at once, instead of remaining for days ? I cannot do it—I cannot remain. I will go away by myself, if they will let me take the steamer.”

She spoke quite wildly ; and Lady Drum looked at her with some alarm.

“ I cannot understand a bit o’ this,” she said, gravely. “ What for have ye a fear o’ an island ? Or is it that ye are so anxious to follow your cousin ? ”

“ I cannot tell you what it is,” said Coquette, “ for I cannot explain in your language. It is a presentiment—a terror—I do not know ; I only know that if we remain in this island long——”

She trembled so violently as she spoke that Lady Drum feared the girl had been attacked by some nervous fever. Her face, too, was pale ; and the dark and beautiful eyes were full of a strange lustre, obviously the result of great excitement.

At this moment some order of the skipper recalled the eyes of Coquette from looking vaguely over the sea towards the south ; and as she turned her face to the bow, Lady Drum felt the hand that held hers tighten its grasp, for the *Caroline* was slowly creeping in under the shadow of the black Coolins.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONFESSION AT LAST.

SUNSET in the wild Loch Scavaig. Far up amid the shoulders and peaks of Garsven there were flashes of flame and the glow of the western skies, with here and there a beam of ruddy light touching the summits of the mountains in the east; but down here, in the lonely and desolate arm of the sea, the bare and riven rocks showed their fantastic forms in a cold grey twilight. There was a murmur of streams in the stillness; and the hollow silence was broken from time to time by the calling of wild-fowl. Otherwise the solitary scene was as voiceless as death; and the only moving thing abroad was the red light in the clouds. The *Caroline* lay motionless in the dark water. As the sunset fell the sombre and overshadowing hills seemed to loom larger; the twisted and precipitous cliffs grew more and more distant; while a pale blue vapour gathered here and there, as if the spirits of the mountains were advancing under a veil.

Oddly enough, the terror of Coquette had largely subsided when the *Caroline* had cast anchor. She regarded the gloomy shores with aversion and distrust; but she no longer trembled. Indeed, the place seemed to have exercised some fascination over her; for, while all the others were busy with their own affairs, she did not cease to scan with strange and wondering eyes the sombre stretch of water, the picturesque and desolate coast, and the mystic splendours of the twilight overhead. She kept apart from her friends; and appeared even to regard Lady Drum with a distant and apprehensive look.

Lady Drum resolved that she would speak to the Minister, when occasion offered. She was afraid that this niece of his was an incomprehensible young person, given over to visions and dreams, and requiring to be kept well in hand.

Dinner was rather a gloomy affair. Lord Earlshope seemed to consider that, for some reason or other, a conspiracy had been formed against him. He was very courteous and quiet, but spoke chiefly to the Minister, and that with a certain reserve. Lady Drum in vain endeavoured to be lively.

Suddenly the Minister chanced to perceive that there was something wrong. He looked from one to the other ; and at last he said—

“ This wild scenery has had its effect upon us. We have grown very grave, have we not, Lady Drum ? ”

“ I think we are downright solemn,” said Lady Drum, waking herself up as if from a nightmare. “ I cannot understand it. Miss Coquette—as I am told they sometimes ca’ ye—what does it all mean ? ”

Coquette looked up with a start.

“ I do not know,” she said. “ To me these mountains look dreadful. I am afraid of them. I should be glad to be away.”

Lord Earlshope did not reply to her, or endeavour to reason her out of her vague impressions. On the contrary, he regarded her—when no one else was looking—with a watchful and rather wistful scrutiny, which seemed to leave rather a sad impression on his own face.

The night was cold ; and, after dinner, no one proposed to go on deck. Indeed, the autumn was rapidly closing in upon them ; and there was comfort in the yellow light of the lamps, the warmth, and the open books down below. Lord Earlshope and Lady Drum proceeded to engage in a game of cribbage ; the Minister took up a bundle of MSS. ; Coquette receded into a corner.

Then she stole out of the place, and went up on deck. How wonderful was the darkness now !—for it seemed to burn with all manner of weird and fanciful lights. There were white stars dancing on the water—one great planet quivering on the dark plain as if it were a moon. Then over the peaks of the Coolins there still lay the lambent traces of the twilight—a pale metallic glow, which was far too faint to show on the black surface of the sea. A wind had sprung up, too, and it brought with it the sound of the mountain streams from out of the solemn stillness that dwelt everywhere around.

There came into her head the refrain of a song which she used to hear the sailors sing in St. Nazaire—

Après trois ans d'absence
Loin de France,
Ah ! quel beau jour,
Que le jour du retour !

"Why cannot I go back there?" she murmured to herself, "where there were no miserable days, no miserable nights? I am terrified of this place—of the people—of what I have become myself. If I could only fly away down to the south, and hear them singing that on the Loire—

Ah! quel beau jour,
Que le jour du retour!

—that is what I would say also, when I saw old Nannette come out to welcome me—and she would laugh, and she would cry to see me——"

The tears were running down her own cheeks. Suddenly there stood by her a tall figure in the darkness, and she started to hear her name pronounced.

"Why do you sit up here alone, Miss Cassilis?" said Lord Earlshope.

She could not answer. He took a seat beside her, and said—

"There is another question I want to ask you. Why have you avoided me these two days, and made me as though I were a stranger to you? Let us be frank with each other. Are you vexed with me because—in a moment of foolishness which I deeply regret—I revealed to you a secret which I ought to have kept to myself?"

"I am not vexed," she said in a low voice. "You must not suppose that."

"But I must suppose something," he said. "Why should I be your *bête noire*, from whom you must fly at every conceivable moment? If I appear on deck you seek refuge with Lady Drum, or go below. If I go below you come on deck. If I join in a conversation you become silent. Why should this be so? I proposed this excursion, as you know, for your especial benefit. The whole thing was planned merely because it might probably amuse you; and yet you are the only one on board who seems unhappy. Why? I broke my compact about returning to Airlie after seeing you a day or two on the voyage, partly through indolence, and partly because I fancied I might make matters smooth and pleasant for you if you went farther. I find, on the contrary, that I have become a kill-joy."

"Oh, no, it is not so!" she said, hurriedly. "There is no one in fault—no one but myself."

"But you are not in fault," he protested. "There has been no fault committed; and I want to know how the old condition of affairs is to be restored. I cannot bear to see you suffering this restraint from morning till night. Rather than have you pass such another day as I know you have passed to-day I would row ashore this moment, and take my chance of finding my way over to Broadford, so that you should have no fear of to-morrow."

"Oh, no, no!" she said, in despair; "you must not do that. And you must not suppose that I am angry with you. But after what you did say the other day——"

"That is it," he said, in a tone of profound disappointment. "I had already fancied my careless talk was a blunder, but I see only now how irretrievable it is. Well, I cannot help it. You shall not suffer the penalty of my stupidity, however. To-morrow morning you shall be free."

So he went away; and she sat still, silent and immovable, with a great pain at her heart. She listened to the murmur of the water along the shore, and it seemed to have taken up the refrain that had been running in her memory, only that it was more vague and more sad. "*Trois ans d'absence . . loin de France . . jour du retour.*" Again she was startled by the approach of some one. She knew that Lord Earlishope had returned. He brought with him a thick shawl, and he said, in a somewhat formal and courteous way—

"Lady Drum asks you to put this round you, if you prefer to remain on deck. But the night is chilly, and you ought to go below, I think."

"I do not know why you should speak to me in that tone," she said, with some slight touch of reproach in her voice. "If all this unfortunate thing has happened, why make it worse? I hope you will not make us strangers to each other, or think me ungrateful for all the kindness that you did show to me."

For an instant he stood irresolute, and then he said to her—in so low a voice that it was scarcely heard in the murmur of the sea—

"And I have to thank you for something also. You have

given me back a little of my old belief in the sweetness and innocence of good women, and in the nobleness and the mystery of human life. That is not a light matter. It is something to have some of one's old faith back again, however dearly it may be bought. The price has been perhaps heavier than you may have imagined. I have striven this day or two back to make you believe that I had almost forgotten what I told you. I shall never forget it—nor do I wish to. I may tell you that now, when I am about to ask you to say good-bye. It is not for you to be annoyed or troubled with such matters. You will go back to Airlie. You will scarcely remember that I ever told you my wretched and foolish story. But I shall not go back to Airlie—at least not for a while ; and when we do meet again, I hope you will have forgotten all this, and will not be afraid to meet me. So good-bye now, for I shall not see you in the morning.”

He held out his hand, but she made no response. What was it he heard in the stillness of the night ?

Moved by a great fear, he knelt down beside her, and looked into her face. Her eyes were filled with tears ; and the sound he had heard was that of a low and bitter sobbing. There broke upon him a revelation far more terrible than that which had informed him of his own sorrow ; and it was with a new anxiety in his voice that he said to her—

“Why are you distressed. It is nothing to you—my going away ? It cannot be anything to you, surely ?”

“It is very much—your going away,” she said, with a calmness of despair which startled him ; “I cannot bear it. And yet you must go—and never see me again. That will be better for you and for me.”

He rose to his feet suddenly ; and even in the starlight her tearful and upturned eyes saw that his face was ghastly pale.

“What have I done ? What have I done ?” he exclaimed, as if accusing himself to the still heavens that burned with their countless stars above him. “My own blunders, my own weakness, I can answer for—I can accept my punishment—but if this poor girl has been made to suffer through me—that is more than I can bear. Coquette—Coquette—tell me you do not mean all this ! You cannot mean it—you do not understand my position—you tell me what it is

madness to think of ! What you say would be to any other man a joy unspeakable—the beginning of a new life to him ; but to me——”

He shuddered only, and turned away from her. She rose, and took his hand gently, and said to him, in her low, quiet voice—

“I do not know what you mean ; but you must not accuse yourself for me, or give yourself pain. I have made a confession—it was right to do that, for you were going away, and you might have gone with a wrong thought of me, and have looked back and said I was ungrateful. Now you will go away knowing that I am still your friend—that I shall think of you sometimes—and that I shall pray never, never to see you any more, until we are old people, and we may meet, and laugh at the old stupid folly.”

There was a calm sadness in her tone that was very bitter to him : and the next moment he was saying to her in almost a wild way—

“It shall not end thus. Let the past be past, Coquette ; and the future ours. Look at the sea out there—far away beyond that you and I may begin a new life ; and the sea itself shall wash out all that we want to forget. Will you come, Coquette ? Will you give up all your pretty ways, and your quiet home, and your amiable friends, to link yourself to a desperate man, and snatch the joy that the people in this country would deny us ? Let us seek a new country for ourselves. You love me, my poor girl, don't you ? and see ! my hand trembles with the thought of being able to take you away, and fight for you, and make for you a new world, with new surroundings, where you would have but one friend, and one slave. What do you say, Coquette ? Why should we two be for ever miserable ? Coquette——”

She drew back from him in fear.

“I am afraid of you now,” she said, with a strange trembling. “You are another man. What are you ?—what are you ?—Ah ! I do see another face——”

She staggered backward ; and then, with a quick cry, fell insensible. He sprang forward to catch her ; and he had scarcely done so when the Minister hastily approached.

“What is the meaning of this ?” he said.

“She has been sitting too long alone,” said Lord Earls-

hope, as Lady Drum hastened to seize the girl's hands. "The darkness had got hold of her imagination—and that wild light up there——"

For at this moment there appeared over the black peaks of the Coolins a great, shifting flush of pink—that shone up the dark skies and then died out in a semicircle of pale violet fire. In the clear heavens this wild glare gleamed and faded, so that the sea also had its pallid colours blotting out the white points of the stars. Mr. Cassilis paid little attention to the explanation ; but it seemed reasonable enough ; for the girl, on coming to herself, looked all round at this strange glow of rose-colour overhead, and again shuddered violently.

"She has been nervous all day," said Lady Drum ; "she should not have been left alone."

They took her below ; but Earlshope remained above. In a little while he went down into the saloon, where Mr. Cassilis sat alone, reading.

"Miss Cassilis will be well in the morning, I hope," he said, somewhat distantly.

"Oh, doubtless, doubtless. She is nervous and excitable—as her father was—but it is nothing serious."

"I hope not," said Earlshope.

He took out writing materials, and hastily wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper, which he folded up and put in an envelope. Then he bade Mr. Cassilis good-night, and retired.

But towards midnight Coquette, lying awake, heard cautious footsteps on deck, and the whispering voices of the men. In the extreme silence her sense of hearing was painfully acute. She fancied she heard a boat being brought round. There was a moment's silence ; then the words, "Give way !"—followed by a splash of oars.

She knew that Lord Earlshope was in the boat which was now making for the shore through the darkness of the night. All that had occurred on deck seemed but a wild dream. She knew only that he had left them—perhaps never to see her again in this world ; she knew only that her heart was full of anguish ; and that her fast-flowing tears could not lessen the aching pain.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LOIN DE FRANCE.

A DULL grey day lay over Loch Scavaig. A cold wind came in from the sea, and moaned about the steep rocks, the desolate hills, and the dark water. The wildfowl were more than usually active, circling about in flocks, restless and noisy. There were signs of a change in the weather, and it was a change for the worse.

Mr. Cassilis was the first on deck.

"Please, sir," said the skipper, coming forward to him, "his lordship bade me say to ye that he had to leave early this morning to catch the steamer, and didna want to disturb ye. His lordship hoped, sir, you and my lady would consider the yacht your own while ye stayed in it, and I will take your orders for anywhere ye please."

"What a strange young man!" said the Minister to himself, as he turned away.

He met Lady Drum, and told her what he had heard.

"He is fair daft," said the elderly lady, with some impatience. "To think of bringing us up here to this outlandish place, and leaving us without a word o' apology; but he was never to be reckoned on. I have seen him get into a frightful temper, and walk out o' my house, just because a young leddy friend o' mine would maintain that he looked like a married man."

"How is my niece?" said the Minister.

"I was about to tell ye, sir," returned Lady Drum, in a cautious and observant way, "that she is still a little feverish and excited. I can see it in her restlessness and her look. It must have been coming on; and last night—wi' the darkness, and the wildness o' this fearsome place, and the red Northern Lights in the sky—it is no wonder she gave way."

"But I hope it is not serious," said the Minister, hastily. "I know so little of these ailments that I must ask ye to be mindful o' her, as if she were your own child, and do with her what ye think proper. Is she coming on deck?"

"No," said Lady Drum, carefully watching the effect of her speech as she proceeded. "She will be better to lie quiet for the day. But we must guard against her having another shock. We must get away from here, sir, directly."

"To be sure, to be sure," said the Minister, almost mechanically. "Where shall we go?"

"Let us go straight back to Oban, and from there perhaps Miss Cassilis would prefer to go to Greenock by the steamer."

The skipper received his orders. Fortunately, although the day was lowering and dismal, the wind did not rise, and they had a comparatively smooth voyage southwards. The Minister remained on deck, anxious and disturbed; Lady Drum was in attendance on Coquette.

The Minister grew impatient and a trifle alarmed when no news came from his niece. At last he went below and knocked at the door of her state-room. Lady Drum came out, shut the door behind her, and went with the Minister along into the saloon.

"But how is she?" said he. "Why does she keep to her room if she can come out?"

Lady Drum was evidently annoyed and embarrassed by these questions, and answered them in a hesitating and shuffling way. At length she said, somewhat insidiously—

"Ye do not understand French, Mr. Cassilis?"

"No," said the Minister; "I have never studied the language of a nation whose history is not pleasant to me."

"I once knew plenty of French," said Lady Drum, "and even now manage to get through a letter to my friends in Paris; but her rapid talk——"

"Whose rapid talk?" said the Minister.

"Why, your niece——"

"Is it French she is talking?" said he.

Lady Drum bit her lip and was silent; she had blurted out too much.

"You do not mean to say that Catherine is delirious?" said the Minister, suddenly standing up with a pale face, as if to meet and defy the worst news that could reach him.

Lady Drum hurriedly endeavoured to pacify him. It was nothing. It was but a temporary excitement. She would recover with a little rest. But this tall, sad-faced man would hear none of these explanations; he passed Lady Drum, walked along and entered the state-room, and stood by the little bed where his niece lay.

She saw him enter, and there was a smile of welcome on her pale face. Perhaps it was the dim light, or the exceeding darkness and lustre of the eyes which were fixed upon him, which made her look so pale; but her appearance there, with her wild dark hair lying loosely on the white pillow, struck him acutely with a sense of vague foreboding and pain.

"Is it you, papa?" she said, quietly, and yet with a strange look on her face. "Since I have been ill I have been learning English to speak to you, and I can speak it very well. Only Nannette does not seem to understand—she tires me—you must send her away——"

With a weary look she let her face sink into the pillow.

"Catherine," said the Minister, with a great fear at his heart, "don't you know me?"

She did not answer or pay any attention for a few seconds, and then she said:

"Yes, of course, I know. But you must teach me how to sleep, papa, for there is a noise all round me, and I cannot sleep. It is like waves, and my head is giddy and rocks with it and with the music. You must keep Nannette from singing, papa—it vexes me—and it is always the same—*trois ans d'absence—loin de France—ah, quel beau jour!*—and I hear it far away—always Nannette singing——"

Lady Drum stole in behind the Minister, and laid her hand on his arm.

"You must not be alarmed," she whispered; "this is nothing but the excitement of yesterday, and she may have caught a cold and made herself subject to a slight fever."

The Minister said nothing, but stood in a dazed way, looking at the girl with his sad grey eyes, and apparently scarcely able to realise the scene before him.

"When shall we reach Tobermory?" he asked, at length.

"In about two hours," said Lady Drum.

The girl had overheard ; for she continued to murmur, almost to herself—

“Shall we be home again, papa, in two hours, and go up past St. Nazaire ? It is a long time since we were there—so long ago it seems a mist, and we have been in the darkness. Ah ! the darkness of last night out on the sea, with the wild things in the air—the wild things in the air—and the waves crying along the shore. It is three years of absence, and we have been away in dreadful places, but now there is home again, papa—home, and Nannette is singing merrily in the garden, and my mamma does come to the gate. But why does she not speak ? Why does she turn from me ? Does she not know me any more—not know Coquette ? And see ! see ! papa, it is all going away : the garden is going back and back—my mamma has turned her face away, and I can scarcely see her for the darkness—have we not got home, not yet, after all ?—for it is away now in a mist, and I can see nothing, and not even hear Nannette singing.”

The Minister took the girl's hand in his ; great tears were running down his cheeks, and his voice was broken with sobs.

“My girl, we shall be home presently. Do not distress yourself about it ; lie still, the boat is carrying you safely home.”

He went on deck ; he could not bear to look any more on the beautiful, wistful eyes that seemed to him full of entreaty. They carried a cruel message to him—like the dumb look of pain that is in an animal's eyes, when it seeks relief, and none can be given. Impatiently he watched the yacht go down through the desolate waste of grey sea, the successive headlands and bays slowly opening out as she sped on. He paced up and down the narrow strip of deck, wearying for the vessel to get round Ardnamurchan. It was clearly impossible for them to reach Oban that night ; but surely there would be a doctor in Tobermory, who could give Lady Drum sufficient directions.

The evening was deepening into dusk as they got into the Sound of Mull. Coquette had fallen into a deep sleep, and her constant nurse and attendant was rejoiced. The Minister, however, was not a whit less anxious ; and it was with eager eyes that he scanned the narrowing distance between the prow of the yacht and Tobermory Bay. At length the

Caroline reached her berth for the night, and the anchor was scarcely let go when the Minister got into the gig and was rapidly rowed ashore. A short time thereafter he had returned to the yacht, bringing with him the doctor ; while Lady Drum had gone on deck to see that the sailors postponed the more noisy of their operations until *Coquette* should have awakened from her slumbers.

The Minister's first notion had been that his niece should be taken ashore so soon as they got near a habitable house. But, apart from the danger of the removal, could she be better situated in a Tobermory inn than in this little cabin, where she could have the constant care of Lady Drum ? The present consultation afforded him some relief. It was probably only a slight fever, the result of powerful nervous excitement and temporary weakness of the system. She was to remain where she was, subject to the assiduous attentions of her nurse ; a physician was to be consulted when they reached Oban ; and, if circumstances then warranted it, she might be gently taken south in the yacht to her own home.

Next day, however, the fever had somewhat increased ; and the wild imaginings—the pathetic appeals—and the incoherent ramblings of the girl's delirium grew in intensity. The bizarre combinations of all her recent experiences were so foreign to all probability that her nurse paid but little attention to them, although she was sometimes deeply affected by the pathetic reminiscences of her charge, or by the lurid descriptions of dark sea scenes which were apparently present to the girl's imagination with a ghastly distinctness. Yet through all these fantastic groupings of mental phenomena there ran a series of references to Lord Earlshope, which Lady Drum was startled to find had some consistency. They occurred in impossible combinations with other persons and things ; but they repeated, with a strange persistency, the same impressions. On the afternoon of the day on which they arrived at Oban—the physician having come and gone—*Coquette* beckoned her companion to sit down by her. She addressed her as *Nannette*, as she generally did, mistaking her elderly friend for her old nurse.

"Listen, *Nannette*. Yesterday I did see something terrible. I cannot forget it," she said, in a low voice, with her dark

eyes apparently watching something in the air before her. "It was Lord Earlshope coming over the sea to me—walking on the water—and there was a glare of light around him; and he seemed an angel that had come with a message, for he held something in his hand to me, and there was a smile on his face. You do not know him, Nannette—it is no matter. All this happened long ago—in another country—and now that I am home again it is forgotten, except when I dream. Are you listening, poor old Nannette? As he came near the boat, I held out my hand to save him from the waves. Ah! the strange light there was. It seemed to grow day, although we were up in the north, under the black mountains, and in the shadow of the night-clouds. I held out my hand to him, Nannette; and he had almost come to me—and then—and then—there was a change—and all the light vanished, and he dropped down into the sea, and in place of Lord Earlshope there was a fearful thing—a devil—that laughed in the water, and swam round, and I ran back for fear. There was a red light around him in the sea, and he laughed, and stretched up his hands. Oh, it was dreadful—dreadful—Nannette!" the girl continued, moaning and shuddering. "I cannot close my eyes but I see it—and yet, where is the letter I got before he sank into the water?"

She searched underneath her pillow for the note which Earlshope had left for her on the night before he went. She insisted on Lady Drum reading it. The old lady opened the folded bit of paper, and read the following words—"*I was mad last night. I do not know what I said. Forgive me; for I cannot forgive myself.*"

What should she do with this fragment of correspondence which now confirmed her suspicions? If she were to hand it back to the girl it was probable she might in her delirium give it to Mr. Cassilis, who had enough to suffer without it. After all, Lady Drum reflected, this message criminated no one; it only suggested a reason for Lord Earlshope's sudden departure. She resolved to retain that note in her possession for the meantime, and give it back to Coquette when the girl should have recovered.

"May I keep this message for a little while?" she asked, gently.

Coquette looked at it, and turned away her head and murmured to herself—

“Yes, yes, let it go—it is the last bit of what is now all past and gone. Why did I ever go away from France—up to that wild place in the north, where the night has red fire in it, and the sea is full of strange faces? It is all past and gone. Nannette, Nannette, have I told you of all that I saw in Scotland—of the woman who did take my mother’s crucifix from me, and the old man I used to fear, and the Highlander, and my brave cousin Tom, and my uncle, and—and another who has got no name now! I should not have gone there—away from you, my poor old Nannette—but now it is all over, and I am come home again. How pleasant it is to be in the warm south again, Nannette! I shall never leave France any more—I will stay here, under the bright skies, and we will go down to the river, as we used to do, and you will sing to me. Nannette, Nannette, it is a pretty song—but so very sad—do you not know that this is the day of our return to France—that we are at home now—at home?”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

It was a Sunday morning in winter. For nearly a fortnight Airlie moor had been lying under a black frost. The wind that whistled through the leafless woods and swept over the hard ground was bitterly cold; the sky was grey and cheerless; the far stretch of the sea was more than usually desolate. The winter had come soon on the heels of autumn; and already all the manifold signs of life which had marked the summer were nipped off and dead. The woods were silent; the murmur of the moorland rivulet had been hushed, for its narrow channel contained a mass of ice; and the stripped and bare fields over which the piercing wind blew were hard as iron.

Then there was one night’s snow; and in a twinkling the whole scene was changed. On the Saturday night a certain stranger had arrived in Ardrossan, and put up at an inn there. He had come down from Glasgow in a third-class carriage, and had had a sufficiently cheerless journey. But now,

on this Sunday morning, when he got up, and went out, lo ! there was a new world all around him. The sun was shining brightly over the great white fields ; the trees hung heavy with the snow ; the straggling groups of men and women coming in from the country to church, moved ghostlike and silent along the white roads ; and the sea outside had caught a glimmer of misty yellow from the sunlight, and was almost calm. The bright and clear atmosphere was exhilarating, although yet intensely cold ; and as this solitary adventurer issued forth from the town, and took his way up to the high country, the keen air brought a glow of colour into his young and healthy face. The frost had evidently neither stiffened his limbs nor congealed his blood ; and yet even when the brisk exercise had made him almost uncomfortably warm, he still kept his Scotch cap well down over his forehead, while the collar of his topcoat was pulled up so as to conceal almost the whole of the rest of his face.

His light and springy step took him rapidly over the ground, and his spirits rose with the fresh air and the joyous exercise. He began to sing "Drumclog," Sunday morning as it was. Then, when he had gained a higher piece of country, and turned to look round him on the spacious landscape—when he saw the far hills and the valleys shining in the sunlight, the snow lying thick and soft on the evergreens, and the sea grown blue and silvery around the still whiteness of the land—he drew a long breath, and said to himself :

"Wouldn't it be worth while to live twenty years in Glasgow to catch a glimpse of such a picture as that, and get a mouthful of the clear air ?"

By-and-by he came in sight of Airrie, and then he moderated his pace. Over the silence of the snow he could hear the sharp clanging of a bell. A dark line of stragglers was visible on the whiteness of the moor, on their way to the small church, the roof of which sparkled in the sunlight. Beyond that again, and higher up, was the dusky wall of the Manse, over which looked some of the windows of the house. One of the panes caught the sun at an angle, and sent out into the clear atmosphere a burning ray of light, which glittered over the moor like a yellow star.

At last he came to a dead stop, by the side of a piece of

coppice. He heard voices behind him, and, turning, saw two or three people coming up the road. Evidently wishing to avoid them, he jumped over the low hedge by the side of the path, and made his way a little distance into the wood. The thickness and softness of the feathery snow deadened every sound.

But when he looked towards the road again, he saw that through the leafless trees it might be possible for any one to descry him; and so he went on again, gradually getting down into a hollow, until, suddenly, he found himself confronted by a man. The two looked at each other; the one alarmed, the other annoyed. At last, the elder of the two called out:

"Cot pless me, is it you, indeed and mirover?"

The younger of the two men did not answer, but began to look about, and, after a brief search, picked up a bit of string and wire which lay plainly marked on the snow.

"Neil, Neil, is this how ye spend the Sabbath morning?" said he.

"And wass you thinking sat bit o' string wass mine?" said Neil, indignantly, "when it is John M'Kendrick will ask me to go out and watch sa men frae the iron-works sat come up to steal sa rabbits!"

"Oh! ye were sent out to watch the poachers?"

"Jist sat," said Neil the Pensioner, looking rather uncomfortably at the snare in the other's hands.

"Do ye ken where leears gang to?" said the Whaup—for he it was.

"Toots, toots, man!" said the Pensioner, insidiously, "what is sa harm if a body rins against a bit rabbit? There is mair o' them san we can a' eat; and when ye stand in sa wood, wi' your legs close, sey rin just clean against your feet, and it will pe no human man could keep his fingers aff. And what for are ye no at sa kirk yersel', Maister Tammas?"

"Look here, Neil," said the Whaup, decisively, "I have come down from Glasgow for an hour or so; and nobody in Airlie maun ken anything about it. Do ye understand? As soon as the folk are in church, I am going up to the Manse; and I will make Leezibeth swear not to tell. As for you, Neil, if ye breathe a word o't, I'll hae ye put in Ayr jail for poaching."

"It wassna poaching," said Neil, in feeble protest.

"Now tell me all about the Airlie folk," said the Whaup.

"What has happened? What have they been doing?"

"Ye will ken sat nothing ever happens in Airlie," said Neil, with a slight touch of contempt; "there hassna been a funeral or any forgatherin' for a lang time, and there is mair change in you, Maister Tammass, than in Airlie. You will have pecome quite manly-like, and it is only sa short while you will pe away. Mirover, sare is more life going on in Glasgow—ch, Maister Tammass?"

The old Pensioner spoke wistfully about Glasgow, which he knew had plenty of funerals, marriages, and other occasions for dram-drinking.

"Is my cousin as much better as they said?"

"Oh, she will pe much petter, but jist as white as the snaw itsel'. I wass up to see her on sa Wednesday nicht, and she will say to me—'Neil, where iss your fiddle?' but who would ha' socht o' taking up sa fiddle? And I did have a dram, too."

"Probably," said the Whaup. "Lord Earlshope—what has become of him?"

"Nobody will know what hass come to him, for he is not here since sey all went away in sa yacht. I tit hear, mirover, he wass in France—and sare is no knowing what will happen to a man in sat country, ever since Waterloo. But Lord Earlshope will pe safer if he will tell them sat he is English. Sey canna bear sa Scotch ever since what we did at Waterloo, as I will have told you often, but sa English—I do not sink it will matter much harm to them in France."

"I should think not, Neil. It was the Highlanders settled them that day, wasn't it?"

"I will tell you," said Neil, drawing himself up to his full height. "It wass Corporal Mackenzie said to me, at six o'clock in sa morning—'Neil,' said he, 'sare will be no Bonypart at the end o' this day, if I can get at him wis my musket.' Now Corporal Mackenzie was a strong, big man——"

"Neil, you have told me all that before," said the Whaup. "I know that you and Corporal Mackenzie took a whole battery captive—men, horses, and guns. You told me before."

"And if a young man hass no pride in what his country hass done ; if he will not hear it again and again," said Neil, with indignation, "it is not my fault."

"Another time, Neil, we will go over the story from end to end. There, the bells have just stopped. I must get on now to the Manse. Remember, if you let a human being know you saw me in Airlie this day, it will be Ayr jail for ye."

The Pensioner laughed, and said :

"You wass always a goot hand at a joke, Maister Tammas."

"Faith, you won't find it any joke, Neil," said the Whaup, as he bade good-bye to the old man, and went off.

As he crossed the moor—the white snow concealing deep ruts filled with crackling ice, into which he frequently stumbled—he saw the beadle come out and shut the outer door of the church. Not a sign of life was now visible as far as the eye could see—only the white heights and hollows, with dark lines of hedges, and the grey twilight of the woods. The sun still shone on the Manse windows, and as he drew near a thrush flew out of one of the short firs in front of the house, bringing down a lot of snow with the flutter of its wings.

He lifted the latch gently, and walked into the front garden. A perfect stillness reigned around. Everybody was evidently at church—unless, indeed, Leezibeth might have been left with Coquette. The Whaup looked over the well-known scene of many an exploit. He slipped round the house, too, to have a glimpse at the rest of the premises. A blackbird flew out of one of the bushes with a cry of alarm. A robin came hopping forward on the snow and cocked up its black and sparkling eye at the intruder. There were two or three round patches of snow on the walls of the stable ; and the Whaup, recognising these traces, knew that his brothers must have been having high jinks there this morning before the Manse had awoke.

Then he went back and cautiously entered the hall. What was this low and monotonous sound he heard issuing from the parlour ? He applied his ear to the door, and heard Leezibeth reading out, in a measured and melancholy way, a chapter of Isaiah.

“What does that mean?” thought the Whaup. “She never used to read to herself. Can she be reading to Coquette; and is that the enlivening drone with which she seeks to interest an invalid?”

It seemed to him, also, that if Leezibeth were reading to Coquette, she was choosing passages with a sinister application. He heard the monotonous voice go on:—“*Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground; there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans; for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate.*” The cheeks of the Whaup began to burn red with something else than the cold. He knew not that Leezibeth had altogether overcome her old dislike for the girl, and waited on her with an animal-like fondness and submissiveness. The Whaup took it for granted that these texts were chosen as a reproof and admonition—part of the old persecution; and so, without more ado, he opened the door brusquely, and walked in.

A strange scene met his eyes. Coquette, pale and death-like, lay on a sofa, with her large, dark eyes fixed wistfully on the fire. She evidently heard nothing. Leezibeth sat on a chair at the table, with a large Family Bible before her. There was no trace of a sick room in this hushed and warm apartment, in which the chief light was the red glow of the fire; and yet it was so silent, save for the low murmuring of these texts, and the girl looked so sad and so phantom-like, that a great chill laid hold of his heart. Had they been deceiving him in their letters?

CHAPTER XXIX.

COQUETTE'S DREAMS.

THE Whaup went over to the sofa, and knelt down on one knee, and took Coquette's hand.

“Coquette,” said he, forgetting to call her by any other name, “are you ill yet? Why are you so pale? Why did they tell me you were almost better?”

She was pale no longer. A quick flush of surprise and delight sprang to her face when she saw him enter; and

there was a new life and pleasure in her eyes as she said rapidly :

" You are come all the way from Glasgow to see me ? I was thinking of you, and trying to make a picture of Glasgow in the coal and flames of the fire ; and I had begun to wonder when you would come back ; and whether it would be a surprise—and—and—I did think I did hear something in the snow outside, and it was really you ? And how well you look, Tom," she added, with her dark eyes full of a subtle tenderness and joy regarding the young man's handsome and glowing face ; " and how big and strong you are ; but, do you know, you seem to be a great deal older ? You have been working very hard, Tom ? Ah, I do know ! And you have come to stay for a while ? And what sort of a house have you been living in ? And what sort of a place is Glasgow ? Sit down on the hearthrug and tell me all about it ! "

She spoke quite rapidly, and, in her gladness and excitement, she tried to raise herself up a bit. The Whaup instantly offered her his assistance, and propped up the cushions on which her head rested. But why did he not speak ? He did not answer one of her questions. He looked at her in a vague and sad way, as if she were somehow remote, and she fancied she saw a tremor about his lips. Then he said suddenly, with a sharpness which startled her :

" Why was I not told ? Why did they make light of it ? What have they been doing to let you get as ill as this ? "

He rose and turned with a frown on his face, as if to accuse Leesibeth of being the cause of the girl's illness. Leesibeth had quietly slipped out of the room.

" What does that woman mean by persecuting you with her texts ? " he asked.

Coquette reached out her hand, and brought him down to his old position beside her.

" You must not say anything against Leesibess ; she is my very good friend, and so kind that she does not know how to serve me. And you must not look angry like that, or I shall be afraid of you ; you seem so much greater and older than you were, and I have no longer any control

over you, as I did use to have when you were a boy, you know."

The Whaup laughed, and sat down on the hearthrug beside her. The fire heightened the warm glow of his face, and touched here and there the brown masses of curling hair; but it was clear that some firmness, and perhaps a touch of sadness had been added to the lad's expression during those few months he had been away from home. There was a gravity in his voice, too, which had replaced the buoyant carelessness of old.

"It is comfortable to be near one's own fire, and to see you again, Coquette," said he.

"It is miserable away in Glasgow?" she said. "This morning, when I saw the snow, I thought of you in the drear town, and did wonder what you were doing. It is Sunday, I said, he will go to church in the morning, and then he will go outside the town for a walk all by himself. He will go through the great gate, and under the big walls. All the trees on the side of the fortifications will be bare and heavy with snow; and the people that pass along the boulevards outside the walls will be muffled up and cold. In the gardens of the *cafés* the wooden benches will be wet and deserted. Then I see you walk twice round the town, and go in again by the gate. You go home, you have dinner, you take a book—perhaps it is the French Testament I gave you—and you think of us here at Airlie. And when you sit like that do you think of the sea, and the old church up here, and the moor; and do you see us as clearly as I can see you, and could you speak to me if only the words would carry?"

He listened as if he were listening to the record of a dream; and, strangely enough, it coincided with many a dream that he had dreamt by himself in the solitude of his Glasgow lodgings.

"What a curious notion of Glasgow you have," he said. "You seem to think it is like a French town. There are no fortifications. There are no walls, no boulevards round the place, nor public gardens with benches. There is a close network of streets in the middle, and these lose themselves, on the one side, in great masses of public works and chimneys that stretch out into dirty fields that are sodden with smoke, and, on the other side, into suburbs

where the rich people have big houses. There is nothing in the way of ramparts, or moats, or fortifications ; but there is a cannon in the West-End Park."

"There is a park, then ? It is not all houses and chimneys ?"

"There are two parks that let you see nearly down to Airlie. On the clear days I go up to the highest point and look away down here, and wonder if I could call to Coquette, and if she would hear."

"You do think of me sometimes, then ?" said she, with the dark eyes grown wistful and a trifle sad.

Had he not thought of her ! What was it that seemed to sweeten his life in the great and weary city but tender memories of the girl away down in that moorland nook ? In the time of constant rain, when the skies were dark, and the roaring traffic of the streets ploughed its way through sludge and mud, he thought of one spot over which, in his imagination, there dwelt perpetual sunshine and a blue sky. When he was sick of the noise and the smoke—sick, too, of the loneliness of the great city—he could think of the girl far away, whose face was as pure and sweet as a lily in springtime ; and the very memory of her seemed to lighten his dull little room, and bring a fragrance to it. Did not Airlie lie in the direction of the sunset ? Many a time, when he had gone out from the town to the heights of Maryhill or Hillhead, the cloudy and wintry afternoon broke into a fierce mass of fire away along the western horizon ; and he loved to think that Coquette was catching that glare of yellow light, and that she was looking over the moor towards Arran and the sea. All the sweet influences of life hovered around Airlie ; there seemed to be always sunshine there. And when he went back into the gloom of the city it was with a glad heart ; for he had got a glimpse of the favoured land down in the west ; and if you had been walking behind a tall and stalwart lad, whose shoulders were as flat as a board, and whose brown hair was in considerable profusion round a face that was full of courage, and hope, and health, you would have heard him sing, high over the roar of the carts and the carriages, the tune of " Drumlog "—heeding little whether any one was listening to his not very melodious voice.

"You must have been much worse than they told me," he said gravely.

"But I am getting very well now," said Coquette, with a smile, "and I am anxious to be quite better, for they did spoil me here. I do not like to be an invalid."

"No," said the Whaup, "I suppose you'd rather be scampering about like a wild pony over the moor, flinging snowballs, and shouting with laughter."

"I did not know that the wild pony was good at snowballs or at laughing," said Coquette. "But you have not told me anything about Glasgow. What you do there? Have you seen Lady Drum since she went away from here, after being very kind to me? How do you like the college?"

"All that is of no consequence," said the Whaup. "I did not come here to talk about myself. I came to see you, and find out for myself why you were remaining so long indoors."

"But I do desire you to talk about yourself," said Coquette, with something of her old imperiousness of manner.

"I shan't," said the Whaup. "I have grown older than you since I went to Glasgow, and I am not to be ordered about. Besides, Coquette, I haven't above half an hour more to stay."

"You do not go away to-day?" said Coquette, with alarm in her face.

"I go away in less than half an hour, or my father will be home. Not a human being must know that I have come to Airlie to-day. I mean to exact a solemn vow from Leezibeth."

"It is wicked—it is wrong," said Coquette.

"Why not say it is a beastly shame, as you used to do?" asked the Whaup.

"Because I have been reading much since I am ill, and have learned much English," said Coquette; and then she proceeded with her prayers and entreaties that he should remain at least over the day.

But the Whaup was inexorable. He had fulfilled the object of his mission; and would depart without anybody being a bit the wiser. He had seen Coquette again; had

listened to her tender voice ; and assured himself that she was really convalescent and in good spirits. So they chatted in the old familiar fashion—as if they were boy and girl together. But all the time Coquette was regarding him, and trying to say to herself what the inexpressible something was which had made a difference in the Whaup's manner. He was not downcast—on the contrary, he talked to her in the frank, cheerful, abrupt way which she knew of old ; and yet there was a touch of determination, of seriousness, and decision which had been quite recently acquired. In the mere outward appearance of his face, too, was there not some alteration ?

“ Oh, Tom ! ” she cried, suddenly, “ you have got whiskers.”

“ What if I have ? ” he said coolly. “ Are you sorry, Miss Coquette, that nature has denied to woman that manly ornament ? ”—and he stroked with satisfaction the dusky golden down which was on his cheeks.

“ I do believe,” said Coquette, “ you did come from Glasgow to show me your whiskers.”

“ You don't seem to admire them as much as you ought to,” he remarked. “ Yet there are many men would give something for these, though they are young as yet.”

“ Oh, you vain boy ! ” said Coquette. “ I am ashamed of you. And your fashionable cuffs, too—you are not a proper student. You ought to be pale, and gloomy, with shabby clothes, and a hungry face. But you have no links in your cuffs, Tom,” she added, rather shyly. “ Would you let me—would you accept from me as a present a pair I have got ? ”

“ And go back to college with a pair of girl's links in my sleeves ! ” said the Whaup.

“ But they are quite the same,” said Coquette. “ It will give me great pleasure if you will take them.”

She rang for Leezibeth, and bade her go up to her room and fetch those bits of jewellery ; and when Leezibeth came back with them Coquette would herself put them in her cousin's sleeves—an operation which, from her recumbent position, she effected with a little difficulty. As the Whaup looked at these pretty ornaments—four small and dark-green cameos set in an old-fashioned circle of delicately twisted gold wire—he said—

"I wonder you have left yourself anything, Coquette. You are always giving away something or other. I think it is because you are so perfect and happy in yourself, that you don't need to care for anything else."

The girl's face flushed slightly with evident pleasure ; but she said—

"If you do call me 'Coquette,' I will call you 'The Whaup.'"

"Who told you to call me that?"

"I have heard it often. Yet it is not fair. You are not any more a wild boy, but a student and a man. Neither am I 'Coquette.'"

Yet at this very moment the deceitful young creature was trying her best to make him forget the peril he was in. She knew that if the people returning from church were to find him in the house, his secret would be lost, and he would be forced to remain. So she talked and questioned him without ceasing, and had made him altogether forget that time was passing rapidly, when suddenly there was a noise somewhere.

"By Jove!" said the Whaup, "they have come back. I must bolt out by the garden and get over the wall. Good-bye, Coquette—get well soon, and come up to see me in Glasgow!"

He darted out, and met Leezibeth in the passage. He had only time to adjure her not to say he had been there, and then he got quickly through to the back-door. In rushing forth he fairly ran against his brother Wattie, and unintentionally sent him flying into an immense heap of soft snow which Andrew had swept along the path ; but the Whaup did not pause to look at his brother wriggling out, blinded and bewildered, from the snowdrift. He dashed through the garden, took hold of a pear-tree, clambered on to the wall, and dropped into the snow-covered meadow outside. He had escaped.

But Wattie, when he came to himself, was struck with a great fear. He ran into the house, and into the parlour, almost speechless between sobbing and terror, as he blurted out—

"Oh, Leezibeth! oh, Leezibeth! the deil has been in the house. It was the deil himsel'—and he was fleeing out at

the back-door—and he flung me into the snaw—and then gaed up into the air, wi' a crack like thunder. It was the deil himsel', Leezibeth—what'll I dae? what'll I dae?"

"Havers, havers, havers," cried Leezibeth, taking him by the shoulders, and bundling him out of the room, "do ye think the deil would meddle wi' you? Gang butt the house, and take the snaw off your claites, and let the deil alane! Ma certes—a pretty pass if we are to be frightened out o' our senses because a laddie tumbles in the snaw!"

CHAPTER XXX.

ON THE WAY.

THE Whaup got clear away from the people coming out of church by striking boldly across the moor. His back was turned to the sea; his face to the east; he was on his way to Glasgow. Briskly and lightly he strode over the crisp, dry snow, feeling but little discomfort, except from some premonitory qualms of hunger; and at length he got into the broad highway which follows the channel of the Ayrshire lochs from Dalry on by the valley of the Black Cart towards Paisley.

It was a bright, clear day, and he was in the best of spirits. Had he not talked for a brief while with Coquette, and seen for himself that there was a glimpse of the old tenderness, and sauciness, and liveliness in her soft black eye? He had satisfied himself that she was really getting better; and that, on some distant day of the springtime, when a breath of the new sweet air would come in to stir the branches of the trees in the West-End Park, he would have the honour and delight of escorting his foreign cousin towards that not very romantic neighbourhood, and pointing out to her the spot on the horizon under which Airlie was supposed to lie.

When would the springtime come?—he thought, as he began to munch a biscuit. Was it possible that his imaginative picture would come true? Would Coquette actually be seen in Glasgow streets—crossing over in front of the Exchange—walking down Buchanan Street—and perhaps up on the little circle around the flag in the South-Side Park?

Would Coquette really and truly walk into that gloomy square inside the old College, and look at the griffins, and perhaps shyly steal a glance at the red-coated young students lounging round? Glasgow began to appear less dull to him. A glamour fell over the grey thoroughfares; and even the dinginess of the High Street became picturesque.

"Why, all the sparrows in the street will know that Coquette has come; and the young men in the shops will brighten themselves up; and Lady Drum will take her to the theatre, in spite of my father; and all the bailies will be asking Sir Peter for an introduction. And Coquette will go about like a young princess, having nothing in the world to do but to look pleased!"

So he struck again with his stick at the snow on the hedge, and quickened his pace, as though Glasgow were now a happy end to his journey. And he lifted up his voice, and sang aloud, in his joy, the somewhat desolating tune of "Coleshill"—even as the Germans, when at their gayest, invariably begin to sing—

"Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten
Dass ich so traurig bin."

The Whaup had not the most delicately modulated voice, but, such as it was, he had plenty of it.

Presently, however, he stopped, for right in front of him there appeared a solitary horseman. There was something in the rider's figure familiar to him. Who was this that dared to invade the quiet of these peaceful districts by appearing on horseback on a Sunday morning? As he drew near, the Whaup suddenly remembered that not a word had been said by Coquette of Lord Earlshope.

The sunlight faded utterly out of the landscape. All the joyous dreams he had been dreaming of Coquette coming to Glasgow grew faint, and vanished. He had quite forgotten Lord Earlshope; and now, it became evident, here he was, riding along the main road in the direction of Airlie.

As Earlshope came near, he drew up his horse. He was clad, the Whaup observed, in a large Russian-looking overcoat, which had plenty of warm fur round the neck of it.

He looked, indeed, more like a foreigner than a country gentleman riding along an Ayrshire road towards his own estates.

No less surprised was Lord Earlshope to meet his boon companion of old:

"Why," he said, "I thought you had left Airlie."

"I thought the same of you," said Mr. Tom.

Earlshope laughed.

"I am obeying a mere whim," he said, "in riding down to Earlshope. I shall probably not stay an hour. How are all the people in Airlie?"

"I don't know," answered the Whaup, "I have myself been there for about an hour, and no more."

"At least you know how your cousin, Miss Cassilis, is?" said he, in a grave tone of voice.

"Yes," said the Whaup, "she is still an invalid, you know, but she is on the fair way to a complete recovery."

"I am glad of that," said Earlshope, hastily. "I am glad of that, for I may not be able to call to see how she is. In fact, I am rather pressed for time this morning. You are sure she is getting well?"

"Yes, I hope so," said the Whaup.

"And will soon be about again?"

"Yes, I hope so," repeated the Whaup, regarding with some curiosity the engrossed and absent way in which the other put his rapid questions.

Earlshope turned round his horse.

"Look here," he said, "I don't wish to be seen about this place, and I don't think I shall go on to Airlie. I only wanted to make some inquiries about your cousin. What you tell me has satisfied me that she is not so ill as I had feared. Where are you going?"

"I am walking to Glasgow," said the Whaup.

"To Glasgow?" said the other. "You won't be there before night!"

"That is not of much consequence."

"I will go to Glasgow with you, if you like. We can take the horse alternately."

"The horse would think you were mad if you were to walk him all the way up to Glasgow in this snow," said the Whaup.

"True, true," said Lord Earlshope, absently. "I shall strike across country for Largs, and put up there. You saw your cousin to-day?"

"Yes."

"And she is not very much of an invalid?"

"Well, I hope she is getting better," said the Whaup.

"Thank you—thank you," said Lord Earlshope. "You need not say you have seen me. Good day to you!"

So he turned his horse once more, and rode on, with an obviously preoccupied air.

"There goes a man," said the Whaup, watching him disappear, "as mad as a March hare, and madder."

Yet, as he walked on, he found that this brief interview had strangely disquieted him. What business had Earlshope to be asking so particularly about Coquette? Why was he riding down on this Sunday morning for the professed purpose of making inquiries about her? Nay, why should he wish not to be seen? It was evident that in Airlie, where no one had seen his lordship for many a day, there was no expectation of him. The more Tom Cassilis considered the matter, the more profound became his annoyance over the whole affair.

It now seemed to him—looking back over the brief time that he had spent with Coquette—that the most grateful feature of the interview was the fact that Lord Earlshope had not been mentioned. He had been quite forgotten, indeed. There might have been no Lord Earlshope in the world, so thoroughly had he been ignored in that quiet and confidential chat which took place in the Minister's parlour. Yet here he was, riding down by himself within a few miles of Airlie, and with his professed object the wish to see or hear something of Coquette.

The rest of that long walk was not pleasant to the young man. The whole day seemed to have become sombre and gloomy. Why was he compelled to return like a slave to the labour and the loneliness of a strange town, when others had the free country before them, to choose their place of rest as they liked? It seemed to him that he was turning his back now on all that was beautiful and pleasant in the world, and that Lord Earlshope had been left there with such intentions in his heart as were still a mystery. The

Whaup began to forget that he had fraternised with Lord Earlshope on board the *Caroline*. He remembered no longer that he had satisfied himself of that gentleman's being a far more agreeable and honest person than the popular voice of the district would admit. Earlshope's kindness to them all, and his excessive and almost distant courtesy to Coquette and her uncle, were effaced from his recollection; and he knew only that before him lay the long and winding and dreary road to Glasgow, while behind him were the pleasant places about Airlie, and Coquette, and the comfort of the Manse, towards which Lord Earlshope was perhaps now riding.

It was late at night when the Whaup, footsore and tired, reached his lodgings in George Street, Glasgow. His landlady had not returned from evening service; the solitary domestic of the house was also absent; there was no one in the gaunt and dismal house, which he entered by means of a latch-key. He set to work to kindle a fire; but the fire went out; and in the middle of his labours he dropped into a chair and fell fast asleep. The fatigues of the day caused him to sleep on in the darkness and the cold; and the other people of the house, coming in later on, knew nothing of his being in his room.

In the middle of the night he awoke. He was stiff with cold. He sought for matches, and could not find them; so he tumbled into bed in the dark, with his whole frame numbed and his heart wretched. Nor did he forget his miseries in sleep; there was no sleep for him. He lay through the night and tossed about; and if for a moment he fell into a sort of doze, it was to start up again with a great fear that something had happened at Airlie. In these periods of half-forgetfulness, and during the interval when he lay broadly awake, the nightmare that haunted him was the figure of the solitary rider he had met on the Dalry Road. What was the meaning of those anxious inquiries that Earlshope had then made? Why was he disinclined to go on to his own place, and be seen of the people of Airlie? Why go to Largs? Largs—as the Whaup lay and remembered—was not more than fifteen miles from Airlie. Would Earlshope loiter about there in the hope of seeing Coquette by stealth? And why should he wish to

see her? So the weary hours of the night passed, and the grey and wintry dawn began to tell upon the window of his room. The questions, with all their anxieties and doubts, remained unanswered; and there had come another gloomy day, demanding its quota of work.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN AWFUL VISITOR.

It became noised abroad that the devil had been seen in Airrie. The Minister's sons not only took up the story which had been told them by their brother Wattie, but added to it and embellished it until it assumed quite dramatic proportions, and was picturesquely minute in detail. The rumour that grew and widened in the village was that, on the Sabbath forenoon, a black Something had been seen wandering about in the snow round the Manse. The boys, on returning from church, had heard mysterious voices in the deep silence of the small garden. Then Wattie, drawing near to the back-door, had suddenly been blinded by a rush of wind; flames darted out from the house and surrounded him; the current of air drove him into a snowdrift; and the awful Something, with a shriek of fiendish laughter, had fled past him and disappeared, and there was a low rumble, as of distant thunder echoing along the hollow stillness of the sky.

That was the rumour of Sunday night and the following morning; but during the day of Monday there were bruited round some strange stories of mysterious footprints which had been perceived in the snow. A track had been observed leading over the moor towards the garden-wall, and suddenly stopping there. Now, not only was it impossible for any being of mortal shape and limbs to leap that high wall, but there was this further peculiarity remarked, that the footprints formed but one line. A slight fall of snow, it is true, during the morning had somewhat blurred the outline of these marks; but it was confidently asserted that they were not such as had ever been made by the impress of a human foot.

Towards nightfall Mr. Gillespie, having finished off some

parochial business, deemed it his duty to go up to the Manse to communicate these disturbing stories to the Minister. The Schoolmaster had a visitor that evening—Mr. Cruikshanks, the Tailor—who sometimes dropped in to have a glass of toddy and a chat over public affairs. The Tailor was a small, thin, black-a-vised man, of highly nervous temperament, who was suspected of having been a Chartist, and who had been known at a public meeting in Saltcoats—for he was a great orator—to express views which were of a wild and revolutionary nature. Nevertheless, up here in Airlie he conducted himself in a fitting manner; went regularly to church; observed the Communion; never failed to have the mended pair of breeks or the new coat home in good time; and, if he did sympathise with the French republicans, said little about it. Indeed, it was not to be controverted that the Pensioner knew far more about France and the French than the excitable little Tailor; for the former had driven whole regiments of prisoners before him like sheep, and could tell you how the contemptible and weakly things asked for water and bread, using language of their own for want of a better education.

Mr. Cruikshanks had also heard the ugly rumours current in the village, and quite agreed that the Schoolmaster should go up to the Manse.

“Not,” said he, with an oratorical gesture, “because ye believe in them, sir; but because the Minister maun be warned to set his face against the superstitions o’ the vulgar. The dawn o’ leeberty, Mr. Gillespie, though oft delayed, is never won; and the triumph o’ the great principles o’ rationalism that is progressin’ faur and wide——”

“Rationalism! rationalism!” said the Schoolmaster, in dismay. “Do ye ken what ye’re sayin’, man?”

“Which is not the rationalism o’ the vulgar, sir,” observed the Tailor, calmly. “’Tis of another complexion and pale cast of thought. It has naething to do wi’ releeigion. It is the new spirit—the blawin’ up o’ the auld fossils and formations—the light that never was in poet’s dream. But I will gang wi’ ye, sir, to the Minister’s, if ye are so minded.”

The two went out together. By the help of the yellow light from the small windows, they picked their way through

the muddy and half melted snow of the village street. When they had got clear of the small houses, they found the snow lying thick and crisp and dry on the highway ; and it needed all their watchfulness to decipher, by the aid of the starlight, the line of the moorland road. There was no one abroad at that hour. The villagers had been glad to get into their warm homes out of the cold and bitter wind that blew along the white uplands. From over the broad moor there came not the least sound ; and the only living thing visible seemed the countless myriads of stars, which shone coldly and clearly through the frosty atmosphere. The Schoolmaster and his companion spoke but little as they went ; they were too much engaged in finding the path through the snow. 5

Suddenly the Tailor stopped and involuntarily laid his hand on his neighbour's arm.

"What is it ?" said the Schoolmaster, with a start.

But he had scarcely uttered the words when he saw what had caused his companion to stand still, with his face looking over the moor. Before them—a dark mass in the starlight—stood Airlie Church ; and at one end of it—that farthest from the door—the windows seemed to be lighted up with a dull red glow.

"Wha can be in the kirk at this time o' nicht ?" said the Schoolmaster, quite forgetting to choose proper English phrases.

The Tailor said nothing. He was thinking of Alloway Kirk and the wild revels that had been celebrated there. His talk about the superstitions of the vulgar had gone from his memory ; he only saw before him, over a waste of snow and under a starlit sky, a church which could, for no possible reason, be occupied, but which had its windows touched from the inside with a glow of light.

"Man and boy," said the Schoolmaster, "I have lived in Airlie these twenty years, and never saw such a thing. It is a fearsome licht that. It would be our duty to go and see what it means——"

"There I dinna agree wi' ye !" said the Tailor, angrily. "What business is it o' ours ? Folks dinna sweeten their ain yill by meddlin' wi' other folk's barrels. I am for lettin' the kirk alane. Doubtless it is lighted up

for some purpose. Why, dinna ye ken that the Minister's niece was brought up as a Roman ; and that the Catholics like to hae a' mainner o' mysterious services in the dead o' nicht ? ”

This explanation seemed to afford the Tailor very great relief. He insisted upon it even to the point of losing his temper. What right had the Schoolmaster to interfere with other people's religion ? Why didn't he do as he would be done by ?

“ But we ought to see what it is,” said the Schoolmaster.

“ Ye may gang if ye like,” said the Tailor, firmly. “ Deil the bit o' me 'll steer ! ”

The Schoolmaster drew back. He was not going to cross the moor alone—especially with those rumours of mysterious footprints about.

“ Perhaps ye are right, Mr. Cruikshanks,” he said. “ But we maun gang on and tell the Minister.”

“ Surely, surely,” said the Tailor, with eagerness. “ We hae a sacred duty to perform. We maun get a lamp to see our way, and the keys o' the kirk, and the Minister and Andrew Bogue will come wi' us. The notion o' its being witches—ha ! ha !—it is quite rideeklous. Such superstitions, sir, have power wi' the vulgar, but wi' men like you and me, Mr. Gillespie, wha have studied such things, and appeal to the licht o' reason, it is not for us to give way to idle fears. No ; we will go up to the door o' the kirk, and we will have the maitter explained on rationalistic principles——”

“ I wish, Mr. Cruikshanks,” said the Schoolmaster, with a sort of nervous anxiety and anger, “ ye wouldna talk and talk about your rationalism and your rationalistic principles. I declare, to hear ye, ane would think there wasna a heeven above us.”

But the Tailor continued his discourse on the sublime powers of reason, and waxed more and more buoyant and eloquent, until, the two having reached the gate of the Manse, the Tailor turned upon his companion, and with scorn hinted that he, the Schoolmaster, had succumbed to childish fears on seeing the kirk windows lit up.

“ What more simple,” said the Tailor, in his grandest

manner, "than to have walked up to the door, gone in, and demanded to know what was the reason o' the licht? That is what common sense and reason would dictate; but when fears and superstitions rise and dethrone the monarch from his state, the lord of all is but a trumpery vassal—a trumpery vassal, Mr. Gillespie!"

The Schoolmaster was too indignant—and perhaps too much relieved on finding himself within the shelter of the Manse wall—to reply. The two neighbours walked up to the door of the Manse—looking rather suspiciously at the gloomy corners around them, and the black shadows of the trees—and knocked. The door was opened half an inch.

"Who's there?" said Leezibeth.

"Me," said the Schoolmaster.

"Who's me?" said the voice from within—the door being still kept on the point of shutting.

"Bless my life and body!" cried the Schoolmaster, provoked out of all patience. "Is this a night to keep a human being starving in the snaw? Let us in, woman!"

With which he drove the door before him and entered the passage, confronting the terrified Leezibeth, who dropped her candle there and then, and left the place in darkness.

The Minister opened the parlour door, and the light streamed out on the strangers. Without being asked, the Schoolmaster and the Tailor stumbled into the room, and stood, with dazed eyes, looking alternately at the Minister and at Coquette, who lay on the sofa with an open book beside her.

"What is the matter? What is the matter?" said the Minister; for both the men seemed speechless with fear.

"Has she no been at the kirk the nicht?" said the Tailor.

"Who?" said the Minister, beginning to think that both of his visitors must be drunk.

"Her," said the Tailor—"your niece, sir—Miss Cassilis."

"At the kirk? She has not been out of the house for months."

"But—but—but there is somebody in the kirk at this present meenute," said the Tailor, breathlessly.

"Nonsense!" said the Minister, with some impatience. "What do you mean?"

“As sure as daith, sir, the kirk’s in a lowe!” blurted out the Tailor again, though he still kept his eyes glaring in a fascinated way on Coquette.

To tell the truth, Coquette began to laugh. The appearance and talk of the two strangers—whether the result of drink or of fright—were altogether so abnormal and ludicrous that, for the life of her, she could not keep from smiling. Unfortunately, this conduct on her part, occurring at such a moment, seemed to confirm the suspicions of the two men. They regarded her as if she were a witch who had been playing pranks with them on the moor, had whipped herself home, and was now mocking them. Vague recollections of “Tam o’ Shanter” filled their minds with forebodings. Who knew but that she was connected with these mysterious things of which the village had been talking? Why should the stories have centred upon the Manse? Was she not a Roman, and a foreigner—a creature whose dark eyes were full of concealed meaning—of malicious mischief—of unholy laughter? No wonder there were strange footprints about, or that the kirk was “in a lowe” at midnight.

The Minister abruptly recalled them from their dazed and nervous speculations by demanding to know what they had seen. Together they managed to produce the story in full; and the Minister said he would himself at once go over the moor to the kirk.

“Micht not Andrew Bogue come wi’ a lantern?” said the Tailor; and the Minister at once assented.

With that, the spirits of the two heroes rose. They would inquire into this matter. They would have no devilish cantrips going on in the parish, if they could help it. And so they once more sallied out into the cold night air; and, with much loud talking and confident suggestion, struck across the snow of the moor.

As they drew near to the small church the talking died down. The red light was clearly seen in the windows. Andrew Bogue, who had been a few steps ahead of the party, in order to show them the way, suggested that he should fall behind, so that the light would shine more clearly around their feet. Against this both the Schoolmaster and the Tailor strongly protested; and the discussion ended

by the Minister impatiently taking the lamp into his own hand and going forward. The *posse comitatus* followed close, and in deep silence. Indeed, there was not a sound heard, save the soft yielding of the crisp snow ; and in the awful stillness—under the great canopy of sparkling stars—the red windows of the small and dark building glimmered in front of them.

The Minister walked up to the door, the others keeping close behind him. He endeavoured to open it ; it was locked.

“The keys, Andrew,” he said.

“I—I—I didna bring any keys,” said Andrew, testily. He was angry with his tongue for stammering, and with his throat for choking.

“And how did ye expect us to get in ?” asked the Minister.

“Why, I thocht—I thocht that if there was anybody in the kirk, the door would be open,” answered Andrew, querulously.

“Go back to the Manse and get them,” said the Minister perhaps with concealed irony.

“By mysel’ ?” quoth Andrew. “Across the moor by mysel’ ? What for does any human being want to get into the kirk ? Doubtless there are some bits o’ wanderin’ bodies inside ; would ye turn them out in the cauld ? If ye do want to look into the kirk, there is a ladder ’at ye can pit against the wa’.”

Andrew was ordered to bring the ladder ; but he professed his inability to carry it. The Schoolmaster and the Tailor went with him to a nook behind some back-door ; and presently reappeared—walking stealthily and conversing in whispers—with the ladder, which they placed against the wall. The Schoolmaster, with a splendid assumption of bravery, clambered up the steps, and paused when the tip of his nose received the light from the panes. The others breathlessly awaited his report.

“I canna see anything,” he whispered, coming down rather rapidly.

But where the Schoolmaster had gone, the Tailor would go. Mr. Cruikshanks went bravely up the ladder, and peered in at the window. What could be the meaning of this ghastly stillness, and the yellow light burning somewhere in the church ? He had heard of awful scenes, in which

corpse-lights had come forth all over a churchyard, with vague forms flitting about, in the midst of peals of demoniac laughter. But here was no sound—no movement—only the still glare of a ruddy light, coming from whence he knew not.

But what was this that suddenly echoed along the empty church? The Tailor grasped the top rung of the ladder. He would have given worlds to have got down; but if he had let go, his trembling legs would have thrown him backward. Something was moving in the dim and solitary building—his breath came and went—his head swam round—the ladder trembled within his grip. And at the same moment there was a startling cry, a smothered shriek from the Schoolmaster, as he turned to find in the darkness a figure approaching him. Andrew fell back from the foot of the ladder; and therewithal down came the ladder and the Tailor together with a crash upon Andrew and his lamp, burying the one in the snow, and smashing the other to pieces. A succession of piteous cries from the Tailor broke the silence of the moor; until the Minister, dragging him out of the snow, bade him cease his howling. The Schoolmaster had abruptly retreated; and now the group of explorers, partly on the ground and partly upright, was approached by this dusky figure.

“What is that?” said the Schoolmaster, in an agonised whisper. “Oh, what is’t?—what is’t? What can it be, sir? Speak till’t!”

The Minister having put the Tailor on his legs—though they were scarcely able to support him—turned to the newcomer, and said—

“Well, who are you?”

“Me, sir? Me?” said a deep bass voice, in rather an injured tone, “I’m Tammas Kilpatrick.”

“What! Kilpatrick the joiner?” said the Schoolmaster.

“Well, I hope sae,” said the man; “and I dinna ken what for ye should run away frae a body as though he was a warlock.”

“But how came ye in the kirk at this time o’ night?” said the Minister.

“Deed, ye may well ask,” said the worthy joiner; “for it’s little my maister allows me for overtime; and if he will put

me to jobs like this after my day's work is done, I hope he'll gie me some fire and better company than a wheen rats and mice. Will Mr. Bogue take hame the keys that my maister got frae his wife this afternoon?"

But Mr. Bogue was still in the snow, groaning. When they picked him up they found that the lantern had severely cut his nose, which was bleeding freely. Whereupon the Schoolmaster waxed valiant, and vouchsafed to the joiner an explanation of the panic, which, he said, was the work "o' that poor body, the Tailor. And, mark me, Mr. Kilpatrick," he added, "it is not every man that would have insisted on seeing to the bottom o' this maitter, as I did this night. It was our duty to investigate—or, as I might say, to examine—into what might have raised superstitious fears in Airlie, especially as regards the stories that have been about. It shames me that, as we were proceeding in a lawful—or, I might say, legitimate—manner, to inquire, that poor body, the Tailor, should have set up an eldritch screech, as if he was possessed. He is a poor body, that Tailor, and subject to the fears of the vulgar. If ye hear the neighbours talk o' this night's doings, ye will be able, Mr. Kilpatrick, to say who behaved themselves like men; and I'm thinking that we will be glad o' your company across the moor, and ye will then come in and hae a glass o' toddy wi' us, Mr. Kilpatrick. As for the Tailor there, the poor craytur has scarcely come to his senses yet; but we maun take him safe hame."

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN THE SPRINGTIME.

WHY was there no mention of Lord Earlshope in the letters from Airlie which reached the Whaup in his Glasgow lodgings? The Whaup was too proud to ask; but he many a time wondered whether Earlshope was now paying visits to the Manse, as in the bygone time, and watching the progress of Coquette's restoration to health. Indeed, the letters that came up from the moorland village were filled with nothing but Coquette, and Coquette, and Coquette. The boys now openly called her by this familiar name; and

her sayings and doings, the presents she made them, and the presents she promised to give them when she should go to Glasgow, occupied their correspondence almost to the exclusion of stories of snow-battles with the lads of the neighbourhood.

At last the Whaup wrote and asked what Lord Earlshope was doing.

The reply came that he had not been in Airlie since the previous autumn.

“Why, he must be mad!” said the Whaup to himself. “Not go on to his own house, when he was within two or three miles of it! These French novels have turned his head; we shall have him presently figuring as the hero of a fine bigamy case, or poisoning himself with charcoal fumes, or doing something equally French. Perhaps he has done something desperate in his youth, and now reads French novels to see what they have to say on the subject.”

Among other intelligence sent him by his correspondents during the winter was that on the morning of New Year’s Day (Coquette had been astonished to find that Christmas was held of no account in Airlie) there had arrived at the Manse, directed to that young lady, a large and magnificent volume of water-colour sketches of the Loire. The grandeur of this book—its binding and its contents—was all a marvel at the Manse; and the youngest of the Whaup’s brothers expressed his admiration in these terms:

“It is most wonderful. The boards is made of tortis-shell, with white saytin and wreaths of silk roses and flowers in different colours all round it. There is a back of scaurlet marrocca leather, with gilt. And she put it on the table, and when she began to turn it over she laughed, and clapped her hands thegither, and was fair daft with looking at it; but, as she went on, she stopped, and we all saw that she was greetin’. I suppose it was some place she kenned.”

No one knew definitely who had sent this gorgeous book—not even Coquette herself; but the popular opinion of the Manse determined that it must have been Lady Drum. There were only two people, widely apart, who had another suspicion in the matter; and these two were Coquette and the Whaup. Meanwhile, if the book had come from Lord Earlshope, it was accompanied by no sign or token from

him ; and, indeed, his name was now scarcely ever mentioned in the Manse.

And so the long and hard winter passed away : and there came at last a new light into the air, and soft and thawing winds from over the sea. The spring had arrived, with its warm and sweet breezes ; and all over the countryside there began to peep out tiny buds of brown and green, with here and there, in many a secret nook and corner, the wonder of a flower. And at last, too, Coquette got out of the house, and began to drink in new life from the mild odours and the clear blue-white air. Her eyes were perhaps a trifle wistful or even sad when she first got abroad again ; for the springtime revives many memories, and is not always a glad season ; but in a little while the stirring of new health and blood in Coquette's pale cheeks began to recall her to her usual spirits. The morning was her principal time for going out ; and, as the boys were then at Mr. Gillespie's school, she learned to wander about alone, discovering all manner of secret dells about the woods where the wild flowers were sure to be found. Many and many a day she came home laden with hyacinths, and violets, and anemones, and the white stars of the stitchwort ; and she brought home, too, a far more valuable and beautiful flower in the bloom which everyone saw gathering on her cheek. Sometimes she prevailed on her uncle to accompany her ; and she would take the old man's arm and lead him into strange woodland places of which he had but little knowledge. Leczibeth was so delighted to see the girl become her former self, that she was more than ordinarily pugnacious towards Andrew, as if that worthy but sour-tempered person had been harbouring dark projects against the girl's health. Leczibeth, indeed, had wholly gone over to the enemy ; and Andrew sadly shook his head and comforted himself with prophecies of evil and lamentation.

One day Coquette had wandered down to the very wood in which the Whaup had caught Neil Lamont poaching. She had been exceptionally lucky in her quest for new flowers ; and had got up a quite respectable bouquet for the study mantel-piece. Then she had that morning received from France a little song of Gounod's, which was abundantly popular there at the time. So, out of mere lightness of

heart, she came walking through the wood, and sang to herself carelessly as she went—

La voile ouvre son aile
La brise va souffler—cr—cr—cr—

when suddenly her voice died down. Who was that going along the road in the direction of Airlie? A faintness came over her—she caught hold of a branch of a fir—and then with a half instinctive fear she drew back within the shelter of a few tall stems. It was Lord Earlshope who was passing along the road—walking slowly and idly—and apparently taking no notice of the objects around him.

Her heart beat quickly, and her whole frame trembled, as she remained cowering until even the sound of his footsteps had died away. Then she stole out of the wood, and hurriedly followed a circuitous route which landed her breathless, and yet thankful, within the safety of the Manso. He had not observed her.

But he was in the neighbourhood. He had returned from abroad. Perhaps he would go away again without even seeing her and speaking to her for a moment—unless, indeed, she happened to be out the next morning and so might chance to meet him!

“You must not fall back into any of your dull moods, Catherine,” said the Minister, in a cheerful way, to her that evening, as he happened to perceive her unwonted silence, and the pensive look of her eyes.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

OVER THE MOOR.

COQUETTE’S sleep that night was full of dreams of a meeting with Lord Earlshope; and in the morning she awoke with a confused sense of having been wandering with him in a strange land, which had a threatening sky over it, and all around it the moaning of the sea. She seemed to have a notion that the place was familiar to her; and gradually out of her memory she was able to recall the features of a certain gloomy loch, overshadowed by sombre mountains.

"I will remember no more of it," she said to herself. "That island—is it always coming back?"

Yet those dreams left a troubled impression behind them; and she began to think with some foreboding of a possible encounter with Lord Earlshope if she went out for her accustomed walk. Dared she meet him? Or what if he were here only for a brief time, and went away without a word? As she lay calculating anxiously these probabilities, and trying to decide whether she should go or not, a great dash of rain smote on the windows of the Manse, a glimmer of morning sunlight also struck the panes, and a blustering April wind blew about the chimneys.

"Rain!" she cried, as though she was glad of anything to resolve her anxious doubts. "Then I do not go!"

Nevertheless she rose and dressed quickly. There were no blinds needed for the small windows that looked across the moor. During the progress of her toilette she could see the wild glare of the spring sunshine that chased the rapid and riven clouds which the wind was blowing over the sea. On they came in thunderous masses and filmy streaks—here dark and rainy, there struck into silver; while from time to time there was a period of menacing gloom, followed by the heavy rattle of a shower on roof and windows; then the sudden yellow light again shining out on the dripping trees, on the wet moor, and on the far blue sea-plain that lay around Arran.

"You are in much better spirits this morning," said the Minister at breakfast, after Coquette had been lecturing the boys in a very grand and mock-héroic fashion.

"Yes, in spite of your abominating weather," she replied. "Last night, still and clear—this morning a hurricane! Why is your weather so wild, and your Scotch people so quiet? They are not stormy—no bad temper—no fits of passion—all smooth, and serious, and solemn, as if they did go to a churchyard."

"And that is where we all of us are going, whether in Scotland or France," said the Minister, with a serious smile.

"Yet why always think of it?" said Coquette, lightly. "Why you make the road to the churchyard a churchyard also? No—it is not reasonable. We should have a little gaiety, and amuse ourselves in the meantime. Ah! now do

look at the faces of all those boys ; do they think me wicked ? ”

Indeed, the row of solemn and awe-struck faces which listened to Coquette's Sadduceism provoked her into a fit of laughter, which Leezibeth checked by coming into the room and asking abruptly if more tea were wanted.

Coquette had apparently forgotten that she had been troubled that morning about Lord Earlshope. The boisterous weather had prevented her going out, so that no choice remained to her. But when after the boys had been despatched to school, she was left to herself and her solitary employment at the piano, her vivacity died away. Without any intention she wandered into melancholy strains, and played half-forgotten ballad-airs which she had heard among the peasantry of Morbihan. She began to cast wistful glances towards the changeable landscape outside. At last she gave up the piano, and went to one of the windows, and took a seat there. The intervals of sunlight were growing longer. The clouds seemed more light and fleecy. There was a grey mist of rain down in the south, over Ayr ; but all around her the wet landscape was shining in its young spring greens ; while the gusty west-wind, that blew a warm and moist fragrance about the garden, could not quite drown the music of the thrushes and blackbirds. The sky cleared more and more. Even in the south, the rain-mist lifted, and the sunlight shone on the far promontory. Finally, the wind moderated ; and eventually over all the land there seemed to prevail the fresh clear brightness and sweetness of an April morning.

Coquette put on her small hat (with its dash of sea-bird plumage) and a warm grey woollen shawl, and went out. Her light foot was not heard leaving the house ; and in a few minutes she was on the moorland road—all around her the shining beauty of the spring day, and the glistening of the recent rain. At another time she would have rejoiced in the clear light and the genial warmth of the western breezes : to-day she seemed thoughtful and apprehensive, and dared scarcely look over the moor. She wandered on—her head somewhat downcast ; and when she paused, it was merely to pick up some tiny flower from amongst the wet grass. It was only by a sort of instinct that she

avoided the red pools which the rain had left in the road ; she seemed to walk on—in the opposite direction from Airie—as if she were in a dream.

She became aware that there was some one crossing over the moor on her right ; still she did not look up. Indeed, before she could collect herself to consider how she should speak to Lord Earlshope, supposing he were to meet her, the stranger had overtaken her, and pronounced her name.

She turned—a trifle pale, perhaps, but quite self-possessed—and regarded him for one brief second. Then she stepped forward and offered him her hand. During that instant he, too, regarded her, in a somewhat strange way, before meeting her advances ; and then he said—

“Have you really forgiven me ?”

“That is all over,” she said, in a low but quite distinct voice—“all over and forgotten. It does do no good to bring it back. You—have you been well ?”

He looked at her again, with something of wonder in the admiration visible in his eyes.

“How very good you are ! I have been wandering all over Europe, feeling as though I had the brand of Cain on my forehead. I come back to hear that you have been dangerously ill, without my having had any knowledge of it. I hang about, trying to get a word of explanation said to you personally before calling at the Manse ; and now you come forward, in your old straightforward way, as if nothing had happened, and you offer me your hand just as if I were your friend.”

“Are you not my friend ?”

“I do not deserve to be anybody’s friend.”

“That is nonsense,” said Coquette. “Your talk of Cain—your going away—your fears—I do not understand it at all.”

“No,” said he. “Nor would you ever understand how much I have to claim forgiveness for without a series of explanations which I shall make to you some day. I have not the courage to do it now. I should run the risk of forfeiting the right ever to speak another word to you.”

Coquette drew back, and regarded him steadfastly.

“There,” said he, “did I not tell you what would happen ? You are becoming afraid of me. You have no reason.”

"Yes, perhaps," she said; "but I do not understand why all this secrecy—all this mystery. It is very strange to me—all your actions; and you should be more frank, and trust that I will not make bad interpretation. You wish to be my friend? I am well pleased of that—but why you make so many secrets?"

"I cannot tell you now," he said, hurriedly. "I am too anxious to believe that you have forgiven me for what happened on that hideous night. I was mad—I was beside myself—I don't know what possession I laboured under to make a proposal——"

"Ah, why bring it all back?" said Coquette. "Is it not better to forget it? Let us be as we were before we went away in the yacht. You shall meet me. I shall speak to you as usual. We shall forget these old misfortunes. You will come to the Manse sometimes—as you did before. You must believe me, it will be very simple and natural if you do try; and you shall find yourself able to be very good friends with all of us, and no more brands of Cain on your forehead."

He saw in her soft eyes that she faithfully meant what she said; and then, with a sort of effort, he said—

"Come, let us walk along, and I will talk to you as you go. There is a path along here by which you can cross the moor, and get back to the Manse by Hechton Mains."

How glad she was to walk by his side in the old fashion! It was so pleasant to hear his voice, and to have the grave kindness of his eyes sometimes meeting hers, that she did not stop to ask whether it was merely as friends they were walking together. Nor did she notice, so glad was she, how constrained was his talk; how he was sometimes, in moments of deep silence, regarding her face with a look which had the blackness of despair in it. She chatted on, pleased and happy; breaking imperiously away from all mention of what had happened in the north whenever that became imminent. She did not even perceive whither she was going; she submitted to be led; and even lost sight of the familiar features of the landscape surrounding her own home.

"I wonder if there was ever a woman as unselfish as you are," he said, abruptly and morosely. "I know that you

are pretending to be glad only to make our meeting pleasant and spare me the pain of self-accusation."

"How can you think such morbid things on such a beautiful morning?" she asked. "Is it not a pleasure to be in the open air? Is it not a pleasure to meet an old friend? And yet you stop to pull it all to pieces, and ask why, and what, and how. You—who have been abroad—are not thankful for this bit of sunshine—perhaps that is the reason."

"There is something almost angelic—if we knew anything about angels—in the way you have of forgetting yourself in order to make other people feel at ease."

"And if you are not cheerful this morning, you have not forgotten how to pay compliments," she said, with a smile.

Presently he said—

"I am afraid you must consider me a very discontented fellow. You see, I don't wish just at present to interrupt our new friendliness by explaining why I am not cheerful—why I owe you more contrition than you can understand—why your kindness almost makes me suspicious of your good faith. You don't know——"

"I know enough," she said, with a pretty gesture of impatience. "I wish not to have any more whys, and whys, and whys. Explanations, they never do good between friends. I am satisfied of it if you come to the Manse, and become as you were once. That is all—that is sufficient. But just now—when you have the pleasant morning before you—it is not good to torment yourself by doubts, and suspicions, and questions."

"Ah, well," he said, "I suppose I must suffer you to consider me discontented without cause. It will be of little consequence a hundred years hence."

Coquette laughed.

"Even in your resignation you are gloomy. Why you say that about a hundred years? I do not care what happens in a hundred years: but just now, while we are alive, we ought to make life pleasant to each other, and be as cheerful as we can."

So they wandered on, Coquette not paying particular heed to the direction of their walk. Her companion was not very talkative; but she was grateful for the new interest that had

been lent to her life by his arrival at Airlie, and was in very good spirits. All her fears of the morning had vanished. It seemed a comparatively easy thing for her to meet him ; there could apparently be no recurrence of the terrible scene which was now as a sort of dream to her. Suddenly, however, her companion paused ; and she, looking up, saw that they were now at the corner of the Earlshope grounds, where these joined the moor. There was a small gate in the wall fronting them.

“Will you come into the grounds ?” he said, producing a small key. “You need not go up to the house. There is a sort of grotto, or cavern, which I had constructed when I was a lad, at this end of the copse. Will you go in and see it ?”

Coquette hesitated only for a moment, and then she said —“Yes.” He opened the small gate ; they both passed through ; and Coquette found herself at the extremity of a small path leading through a belt of larches.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LORD EARLSHOPE'S CAVE.

SHE now recollected that long ago the Whaup had told her of some mysterious place which Lord Earlshope had built within his grounds ; and when her companion, begging her to excuse him for a few minutes, passed into what was apparently a cleft in a solid mass of earth or rock, and when she heard the striking of a match, she concluded that he was lighting up the small theatrical scene for her benefit. Nor was she mistaken ; for presently he came out and asked her to return with him through this narrow aperture. He led the way ; she followed. If the cavern into which they entered were of artificial construction, considerable pains had been taken to make it look natural. At first the cleft was open to the sky, and the sides of the passage were covered with ferns and weeds growing in considerable profusion ; but by-and-by she came in front of a large recess, apparently dug out of the solid rock, and involuntarily a cry of wonder escaped her. The walls of this tolerably spacious cave were studded here and there by curiously shaped and pendent

lamps of various hues ; and right at the back was a Chinese stove, on the polished surface of which the coloured lights threw faint reflections. Down one side of the cave a stream trickled ; dropping over bits of rock, and wetting the masses of fern which grew in their clefts. The space in front of the stove was perfectly dry ; and there stood two cane easy-chairs, fitted with small reading-desks, and candles. The whole place looked like a bit cut out of a pantomime ; and Coquette, suddenly finding herself in this strange place, with its dusky corners and its coloured lamps, wholly forgot that outside there reigned the brightness of a spring day.

“What do you think of my boyish notions of the marvellous ?” he said, with a smile.

“It is wonderful,” said Coquette, who fancied she had been transferred to a fairy palace.

“There are incongruities in it,” said he ; “for I changed my hobbies then as rapidly as now. It was begun in imitation of a cavern I had read of in a novel ; it was continued as a mandarin’s palace ; and finally finished up in imitation of the Arabian Nights. But you can imagine it to be what you like, once you have taken off your boots, which must be damp, and put on that pair of Russian slippers which you will find in front of the stove. I shall leave you to complete your toilette, while I go up to the house for some biscuits and wine.”

With which he left, before Coquette could utter a word of protest. She now found herself alone in this extraordinary place. Had he brought her there intentionally ? She had looked at the slippers—they were lady’s slippers, and new. He had evidently, then, anticipated that he would meet her, walk with her, and bring her thither ? She knew not what to do. Yet the slippers were very pretty—curiously wrought with coloured beads, and deeply furred all round. They were seductively warm, too, from having been lying before the stove. So, with a certain defiant air, she sat down, pulled off her tiny boots, and placed them before the stove ; and presently her small feet were encased in the warm and furred slippers, which had apparently been left for her by the genii of the cave.

Then she sat down in one of the easy-chairs ; took off

her gloves ; and extended just so much of the slippers that she could admire their rose-coloured tips. All this conduct on her part she knew to be dreadfully and desperately wrong ; but she was very comfortable, and the place was very pretty. As for the slippers, they were simply not to be refused. Indeed, the whole thing hovered in her mind as half a dream and half a joke ; and when, at length, Lord Earlshope appeared with his stock of provisions, the adventure looked remarkably like one of those house-keeping games familiar to children. As for any apprehension of her indiscreet behaviour being a subject of after annoyance, she felt none whatever. Had not Lord Earlshope and herself quite got back to their old friendly terms ; and what harm was there in her joining in this piece of amusement ? If she had any doubts or misgivings, they were swallowed up in the sensation of warmth lent by the Russian slippers.

Coquette ate one or two of the small biscuits, and drank half a glass of the yellow-white wine, which Earlshope poured out for her. Then she said—

“I do not know how you can go away from this place. I should live here always. Why did you go away ?”

“I am going away again,” he said. She looked up with some surprise—perhaps with a shadow of disappointment, too, on her face.

“How can I stay here ?” he said, suddenly. “I should be meeting you constantly. I have no right to meet you. I am satisfied, now that I know you are well, and that you have forgiven me ; and I do not wish to repeat a bygone error. You—who are always so pleased with everything around you—I see you have forgotten that witchery that seemed to have fallen over us both last summer. You are again yourself—calm, satisfied with yourself—on excellent terms with everybody and everything. But I have not been cured by my few months’ absence. Now that I see you again——Bah ! what is the use of annoying you by such talk ? Tell me, how is your cousin in Glasgow ?”

Coquette remained quite silent and thoughtful, however, with her eyes fixed on the stove before her. After a little while, she said—

“I have not forgotten—I can never forget. I have been so pleased to see you this morning that perhaps I have

appeared light—fickle—what you call it?—in your eyes, and not mindful of your trouble. It is not so. I do remember all that happened; it is only I think it better not to bring it back. Why you should go away? If you remain, we shall learn to meet as friends, as we are now, are we not?”

“Do you think that is possible?” he asked, gravely looking at her.

Coquette dropped her eyes; and said, in a low voice—

“It may be difficult just a little while; yet it is possible. And it seems hard that if we do enjoy the meeting with each other, we must not meet—that I drive you away from your own home.”

“It is odd—is it not?” he said, in rather an absent way. “You have made me an exile, or, rather, my own folly has done that. No, Coquette; I am afraid there is no compromise possible—for me, at least—until after a few years; and then I may come back to talk to you in quite an off-hand fashion, and treat you as if you were my own sister. For I am a good deal older than you, you know——”

At this moment there was a sound of footsteps outside; and Coquette hurriedly sprang to her feet. Earlshope immediately went out to the entrance of the place; and Coquette heard some one approach from the outside. She hastily abandoned her small furred slippers, and drew on her damp boots; then she stood, with a beating heart, listening.

“I am sorry to have alarmed you,” said Earlshope, returning. “It was only a servant with some letters that have arrived.”

But the sound of those footsteps had suddenly awakened Coquette to a sense of the imprudence, and even danger, of her present position, and she declined to resume her comfortable seat before the fire.

“I must go now,” she said.

“Let me show you the way then, if you must,” said he; and so he led her along the winding path, and through the shrubbery to the small gate that opened out to the moor. She had reached the limit of Earlshope; in front of her stretched the undulating plain leading up to Airlie; she was free to go when she pleased.

"I dare not see you home," he said, "or the good people who may have noticed us an hour ago would have a story to tell."

"I shall find my way without trouble," said Coquette, and she held out her hand.

"Is it to be good-bye, then?" he said, looking wistfully at her.

"Not unless you please," Coquette answered, simply, although she bent her eyes on the ground. "I should like you to remain here, and be friends with us as in long ago; it is not much to ask; it would be a pleasure to me, and I should be sorry and angry with myself if I thought you had again gone away because of me. It is surely no reason you should go; for I should think of you far away, and think that it is I who ought to go away, not you; for I am a stranger come to Airrie, and sometimes I think I have come only to do harm to all my friends——"

"My darling!" he said, with a strange and inexpressibly sad look on his face, as he caught her to him, and gazed down into the clear, frightened eyes. "You shall not accuse yourself like this! If there is blame in my staying I will bear it; I will stay, whatever happens; and we shall meet, Coquette, shall we not, even as now, in this stillness, with no one to interrupt our talk? Why do you look frightened, Coquette? Are you afraid of me? See, you are free to go!"

His arms released their hold; and for an instant she stood, with downcast eyes, alone and trembling. But she did not move; and so once again he drew her towards him; and then, ere she knew, his arms were around her, and she was close to his breast, and kisses were being showered on her forehead and on her lips. It was all so sudden, so wild and strange, that she did not stir; nor was she but half-conscious of the fetters of iron which these few swift seconds were fastening down on her life. It was very terrible, this crisis; but she vaguely felt that there was the sweetness of despair and utter abandonment possessing her; that the die had been cast for good or evil, and the old days of doubt and anxiety were over.

"Let me go—let me go!" she pleaded, piteously. "Oh, what have we done?"

"We have sealed our fate," said he, with a haggard look

which she did not see. "I have fought against this for many a day—how bitterly and anxiously no one knows, Coquette. But now, Coquette, but now—won't you look up and let me see that love is written in your eyes? Won't you look up, and give me one kiss before we part?—only one, Coquette?"

But her downcast face was pale and deathlike; and for a moment or two she seemed to tremble. Finally she said—

"I cannot speak to you now. To-morrow or next day—perhaps we shall meet. *Adieu!*—you must leave me to go alone."

And so she went away over the moor; and he stood looking after her for some time, with eyes that had now lost all their wild joy and triumph, and were wistful and sad.

"She does not know what has happened to her to day," he said to himself, "and I—I have foreseen it, and striven to guard against it—in vain."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE NEMESIS OF LOVE.

"At last—at last—at last!" The words rang in her ears as she hurried across the moor—seeing nothing—heeding nothing—her face turned away from the clear blue-white of the spring sky. She was only anxious to get within the shelter of her own home, to resolve those wild doubts and fears which were pressing upon her. In many and many a story of her youth—in many a ballad and song she had sung long ago in the garden overlooking the Loire—she had heard tell of happy lovers and their joy; and, with the careless fancies of a girl, she had looked forward to the time when she, too, might awake to find her life crowned by those sweet experiences that fall to the lot of young men and maidens. And was this love that had come to her at last—not in the guise of an angel, with a halo around his head and mildness in his face, but in the guise of a sorcerer, who had the power to turn the very sunlight into blackness?

Yet, when she had reached the solitude of her own chamber, she asked herself the reason of this sudden dread.

What made her heart beat and her cheek grow pale as she looked back to that phantasmal evening in Loch Scavaig? Was not that all over and gone—forgotten and buried in the past? Indeed, she began to reason with herself over the injustice of recalling it. Had not Lord Earlshope sufficiently endeavoured to atone for—what?

That was the mystery which was confronting her with a terrible pertinacity. She had been oppressed with an unnameable dread during that memorable evening; but what had Lord Earlshope done, beyond talk wildly and almost fiercely for a few minutes? She had almost forgotten the substance of what he had then said. And now that he had expressed his penitence for that strange appeal to her—since he had even punished himself with six months' exile on account of it—why should the memory of it interfere between them as a gloomy phantom, voiceless, but yet holding up a warning finger?

"I do not understand it," she murmured to herself in French. "There is something he will not tell me; and yet why should he be afraid? Does he fear that I shall be unjust or merciless—to him who has never a hard word or a suspicion for any one? Why should he not tell me?—it cannot be anything wrong of himself—or I should see it in his eyes. And whatever it is, it separates us; and I have given my life to a man who seems to stand on the other side of a river from me; and I can only hold out my hands to him; and wish that the river were the river of death, so that I could cross over, and fall at his feet, and kiss them."

She took out a little book of devotions which had been given her by one of her companions on leaving France, and sat down at the small window-table, and placed it before her. A few moments thereafter, Lady Drum, coming into the room, found the girl's head resting on the table covered by her hands.

"Asleep in the middle o' the day!" said the visitor, who had unceremoniously come up-stairs.

Coquette hastily rose, and would have hidden her face by turning aside and going into her bed-room, but that Lady Drum stopped her, and took hold of her.

"What! No rosier than that? And fast asleep in the

middle o' such a beautiful day ! Dear me, lassie ! " she added, looking more narrowly at her, " what are you een so big, and wild, and wet for ? "

Lady Drum walked to the table, and took up the small book. She turned over its pages, and the contempt visible on her face grew fast and fierce.

" Saints—crosses—mealy-faced women wi' circles round their heads—men in blue gowns wi' a lamp by their side—is this the trash ye spend your days over, when ye should be in the open air ? "

Lady Drum clasped the book again ; put it in the drawer of the table ; and shut the drawer with somewhat unnecessary vehemence.

" Phew ! I have no patience wi' the folk that would make every young lass a nun. Come here, my young princess wi' the pale face : are you no a staunch, earnest, indomitable Presbyterian ? "

" I am what you please," said Coquette, timidly.

" Are you, or are you not, a Presbyterian ? "

" Perhaps I am," said Coquette. " I do not know what it is—this Presby—I do not know what you say. But I do keep my books that belonged to me in France. That is a good book—it can do no harm to any one——"

" My certes ! here is a pretty convert ! It can do no harm to any one ?—and I find ye in the middle o' the day, greetin' ower its palaverins, and with a face that would suit a saint better than a brisk young creature o' your age. Ayrshire is no the place for saints—the air is over healthy. Come here, and I will show ye the book that ye must read."

She led Coquette to the window, and began to expatiate on the enjoyments of being out walking on such a day—with the spring winds stirring the young corn, and ruffling the distant blue of the sea. Alas ! all that Coquette saw was the beginning of the line of trees that led down to Earlshope.

" Listen now," said Lady Drum, " I have come here on an errand. Ye have never seen Glasgow. I am going up to-morrow morning ; can you come wi' me—stay two or three weeks—and cheer your cousin's exile a bit ? "

Coquette's conscience smote her hard ; and it was with a

quick feeling of pain and remorse that she thought of the Whaup. She had almost forgotten him. Far away in the great city of which she knew so little, he was working hard, buoyed up by some foolish and fond notion that he was pleasing her. All at once her heart turned towards him with a great affection and yearning. She would make amends for the wrong which he had unwittingly suffered. She would go at once to Glasgow : and would shower upon him every token of solicitude and kindness that she could devise.

"Oh, yes, Lady Drum!" she said, with evident eagerness in her face. "I will go with you as soon as you please. Have you seen my cousin? Is he well? Is he tired of his hard work? Does he speak of us sometimes? He does not think we have forgotten him?"

"Hoity toity! Twenty questions in a breath! Let me tell you this, my young lady, that your cousin, though he says nothing, is doing wonders; and that Dr. Menzies, to whom the Minister confided him, is fair delighted wi' him, and has him at dinner or supper twice or thrice a week; and your cousin is just petted beyond measure by the young leddies o' the house; and bonnier lasses there are none in Glasgow."

Coquette clasped her hands.

"Perhaps he will marry one of them!" she exclaimed, with a wonderful gladness in her eyes.

Lady Drum looked at her.

"Marry one o' them? Would ye like to see him marry one o' them? Has that daft picture-book turned your head and made ye determined to go into a nunnery?"

"It is not necessary he marries me," said Coquette in a tone of protest. "A young man must choose his own wife—it is not pleasant for him to be made to marry by his friends."

"Ah, well!" said Lady Drum, with a sigh. "Young folks are young folks; and they will pretend that the marmalade they would like to steal is nothing but down-right medicine to them. Ye had better begin to think about packing up for to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning!" said Coquette, with a sudden tremor of apprehension.

“Yes.”

“Oh, I cannot go to-morrow—I cannot go to-morrow : will not the next day do, Lady Drum ? May I not have one day more ? ”

Astonished by the sudden alteration in the girl's manner—from delight at the prospect of going to an almost agonising entreaty to be left alone for another day—Lady Drum did not reply for a second.

“What have you to do to-morrow ? ” said the elderly lady, at last, regarding the girl.

“It is nothing—it is not much,” stammered Coquette, with her eyes bent on the ground. “Only I do wish to remain at Airlie to-morrow. It is only one day longer, Lady Drum.”

“Why, you plead as if I were to take ye out for execution the day after. If it will serve ye, I will wait for another day ; and on Friday morning, at ten meenutes to ten, ye must be at the station, wi' a' your trunks and things in good order.”

“But I have not asked my uncle yet,” said Coquette.

“I have, though,” said Lady Drum, “and I'm thinking he'll no miss ye except at breakfast. Since he began to get up that Concordance o' the Psalms, he seems to have withdrawn himself from the world round aboot him, and he's just as it were dead to his friends.”

“It is very kind of you to ask me to go with you,” said Coquette, suddenly remembering that she had not thanked Lady Drum for her offer.

“Na, na,” said her elderly friend, “what would a big house be without a young leddy in it to bring visitors about ? And this time, I must tell ye, a friend o' Sir Peter's has given us the loan o' his house until he comes back from Italy ; and it is a big house overlooking the West End Park ; and I'm thinking we'll find it more comfortable than a hotel. And we will have some company ; and it will no be amiss if ye bring wi' ye such French ornaments or dresses as might be rather out o' place in the Manse o' Airlie. And I am sure ye will be quite surprised to see your cousin—looking a fine, strapping, well-set-up young gentleman, instead o' a lang-leggit laddie ; and it is just possible Lord Earlshope may pay us a visit some evening.”

Did Lady Drum throw out this hint as a vague feeler? She had never penetrated the mystery which had seemed to surround the relations between Coquette and Lord Earlshope during their voyage in the Highlands. She had, indeed, destroyed the scrap of writing handed to her by Coquette when the girl was delirious, unwilling to bother herself with a secret which did not concern her. Still, Lady Drum was just a trifle curious. There was something very peculiar and interesting in the odd notions which this young French creature appeared to have acquired about love and marriage. Lady Drum had never met with any one who held but the ordinary and accepted theories on that attractive subject. Yet here was a young lady who calmly contemplated the possibility of loving some one whom circumstances might prevent her marrying; and at the same time seemed in no wise disinclined to accept the recommendations of her relatives and friends as to her choice of a husband. Were these French notions of the duty of daughters to their parents? Or had they been picked up in idle speculation, and not yet driven away—as Lady Drum felt certain they would be driven away by a real love affair? At all events, the mention of Earlshope's name at once arrested Coquette's attention.

“Does Lord Earlshope ever go to Glasgow?” she asked.

“What for no?”

“And is he likely to meet my cousin at your house?”

“Assuredly. Why not? Why not?”

“I did merely ask a question,” said Coquette, with thoughtful eyes.

Then Lady Drum bade her come down-stairs. The Minister was brought out of his study; and they had a little talk over Coquette's projected trip. At length, Lady Drum sent to see if her coachman was ready; and, finally, with a pleasant “*au revaur, ma fee! au revaur!*” the old lady walked in her grand and stately fashion across the small garden, got into her carriage, and was driven away from Airlie Manse.

There remained to Coquette but one day on which she had the chance of seeing Lord Earlshope; and how was she to bring about a meeting which she half feared, yet could not wholly forego?

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE LAST DAY AT AIRLIE.

ALL during that evening, and in thinking of the next morning, she nursed a sweet and strange poison at her heart. Love seemed no longer to be so terrible as on that ghostly evening in Loch Scavaig; and she grew accustomed to the danger; and she was glad that, come what might, this flower of life had at length fallen upon her and she knew its fragrance. Had she not been told, in many of those old stories, that love for love's sake was enough? She did not care to count its cost. She scarcely paid any heed as to how it might end. Sufficient to know that now, at this moment, her heart was beating wildly against its prison-bars; and would fain have taken wings and flown over the moor towards Earlshope, if only to die on finding a haven.

Nor was there much disquiet in her look the next morning when she rose and discovered that another bright and clear day had come to mark her farewell to Airlie. She was hurried and excited, perhaps, in preparing to go out, but she was joyful, too; and the early morning sunshine, streaming in through the small window, found her eyes full of gladness and hope.

Yet how was she to communicate with Lord Earlshope, and let him know that she wished to say good-bye to him? Clearly, neither her uncle nor Lady Drum knew that he had returned. She dared not send him a message; and equally impossible was it for her to go up alone to the house. Her hope was that he would be on the watch for her; and that another stolen interview would mark the last day she had for the present to spend at Airlie.

She was not mistaken in that vague surmise. When she went out for her accustomed stroll, she had wandered but a little way when she found him approaching her. His look was anxious; but hers was full of affection and trust.

"You are no longer alarmed to see me?" he asked, wondering.

"No," she said. "Why should I? Perhaps I ought

not to meet you in this way ; but it will not be for long. And you—you seem to have dropped from the clouds.”

“I was on my way to the Manse.”

“To the Manse !” she repeated, in some dismay.

“Yes. Do you know any reason why I should not call upon your uncle ? I dared not go near the place until I had assured myself I should not be annoying you. And now I hope to be able to call and see you there, instead of inveigling you into these surreptitious meetings, even although they have the charm of secrecy—and of Russian slippers.”

He had caught some faint reflex of cheerfulness from the gladness of her face ; but there was still about him a look of constraint and anxiety.

“It is too late to think of that,” she said ; “I go to Glasgow to-morrow.”

“Have they found out ? Are they sending you away ?” he asked, hurriedly.

“No ; there is nothing to find out. But Lady Drum, she is good enough to ask me to go with her ; and there I will see my cousin, whom I have promised to visit often, yet have never been able. And I am sorry for him ; alone in that great place, and the people here nearly forgetting him. Does he not deserve some reparation, some kindness from me ?”

She looked up into his face ; and he knew that she meant more than appeared in her words.

“I wonder,” said Earlshope, after a little while, “if he does hope to win your love ; if he is working there with the far-off intention of coming back here and asking you to be his wife ? If that is so, we have acted very cruelly by him.”

“Ah, not cruelly !” she said, as if begging him to reassure her. “If we have forgotten him, can I not make it up to him ? You will see, when I go to Glasgow, I will be very kind to him—he will not think that he has been ill-used.”

“But he will think that you are still looking favourably on his vague hopes—he will be all the more assured that, some day or other, you will become his wife.”

“And if that will make him happy,” she said, slowly and with absent eyes, “there is nothing I will not do to make him happy.”

Earlshope regarded her with a strange look.

"You would become his wife?"

"If that only would make him happy—yes. He deserves so much from me—I will do that, if he demands it."

"You will marry him, and make him fancy that you love him?"

"No," she said, simply. "I should tell him everything. I should tell him that he deserves to marry a woman who has never loved any one but himself; and yet that I—if his marrying me will alone make him happy—I will do what I can, and be his wife."

"So the world goes," said her companion, with a sudden bitterness in his tone; "and it is the good, and the true, and the noble that suffer. You are far too unselfish to lead a happy life, Coquette. You will sacrifice yourself, sooner or later, for the sake of some one you love; and the reward you will get will be reprobation and the outcry of the crowd. And I—I have so far paved the way for all this that if I could free you at this moment by laying down my own life, you would find it no vain boast when I say now that I would do it willingly."

"But you have not made me suffer," she said, gently. "Look now and see whether I am sad or miserable. I have been so happy all this morning, merely to think I should see you—that is enough; and now you are here I am content. I wish no more in the world."

"But Coquette—don't you see?—it cannot end here," he said, almost desperately. "You do not know the chains in which I am bound. I—I dare not tell you—and yet, before you go to Glasgow——"

"No," she said, in the same gentle voice. "I do not wish to know. It is enough for me to be beside you as now—whatever is in store for us. And if it should all be bad and sorrowful, I shall remember that once I was satisfied—that once I walked with you here one morning, and we had no thought of ill, and we were for a little while happy."

"But I cannot stop there," said he. "I must look at the future. Oh, my poor girl, I think it would have been better for us both had we never been born!"

She drew back from him amazed and alarmed. All the grave kindliness of his face had gone, and he was regarding

her with eyes so full of pity and of love that her heart grew still with fear. Why was it that, at the very moment when they were most peaceful and happy—when she merely wished to enjoy the satisfaction of being near him, leaving the future to take care of itself—why was it that this unnameable something should come in between them, and bid her begone from a man who had that to say which he dared not tell her? Yet her hesitation lasted but a moment. After all, she thought, what was her happiness in comparison with that of the man she loved? She saw the pain and the despair written on his face, and she drew nearer to him again, and took his hand in hers.

“I shall never wish that I had not been born,” she said, “for I have known you a little while, and I have walked with you here. The rest is nothing. What can harm us, if we are true to ourselves, and do what we think is right?”

“That is possible to you—who are as clear-souled as an angel,” he said.

Now what could ail two lovers who were walking thus in the happy spring-time—alone together—with youth in their eyes, and all the world before them? Was it not enough for them to be? All things around them were peaceful in the sunlight; the fields lay still and warm in their coating of young green; the birds were busy in the leaves of the hedges; and there was many a jubilant note in the woods. Far away in the south there lay a faint blue smoke over the houses of Ayr; but no murmur of toil and struggle reached them up on these moorland heights. The moor itself, and the fields, and the valleys were as still as the sea; which shone and trembled a pure and pale azure until it was lost in the white of the horizon. They only seemed out of consonance with the peace of this mild and clear spring day, in which the world lay and basked.

They strolled on together—Coquette sometimes picking up a flower—until they had got down to that corner of the Earlshope grounds where the small gate was. They had come thither unintentionally.

“Shall we go in?” said her companion.

“No,” said Coquette. “It is too beautiful outside to-day. Why cannot we be away yonder on the sea, and sail along the coast of Arran, and on and up Loch Fyne,

where the still blue lake is? I do remember it was so pleasant there—but afterwards——”

A cloud fell over her face, and Earlshope hastened to change the subject. He spoke of her going to Glasgow; of the chances of his seeing her there; of the time she would be likely to stay. By this time they had turned again, and were walking in the direction of the Manse. Somehow or other, Coquette seemed unwilling to speak of Glasgow, or to admit that she hoped to meet him. When, indeed, they had come within sight of the house, Coquette stopped, and said she would bid him good-bye there.

“But why are you so sad, Coquette?” he said. “This is no farewell; most likely I shall be in Glasgow before you.”

“I am sorry for that,” she said, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

“Why? What hidden notion of self-sacrifice have you adopted now?”

“You do not seem to know what reparation I do owe to my cousin. It is for him I go to Glasgow. You must not come if it will annoy him—the poor boy! who has not much to comfort him except—except——”

“Except the thought of marrying you, Coquette,” said Earlshope; “and you—you seem to think nothing of yourself, if only you can secure the happiness of everybody else. Ah, well, if you wish me not to see you while you are in Glasgow, I will remain away. Let your cousin have that brief time of enjoyment. But for us two, Coquette—for us two there is no hope of this separation being final.”

“Hope?” she said. “Why do you hope it? Is it not pleasant for us to see each other, if only we do no harm or pain to our friends? Why do you speak in that way, as if some great trouble was about to befall us? Sometimes I do fear what you say; and I think of it at night; and I tremble; for I have no one that I can speak to; but in the morning these fears go away; for I look out of the window, and I know you are near Earlshope, and I am only anxious to see you.”

“My darling!” he said, with a look of great compassion and tenderness in his eyes. “You deserve the happiest life

that ever a true-hearted woman enjoyed ; and when I think what I have done to make you miserable——”

“ Ah, not miserable ! ” she said. “ Do I look miserable ? You must not think that ; nor that I am at all miserable in Glasgow. No, good-bye—good-bye——”

“ For how long ? ” said he, taking both her hands in his.

With that she looked down, and said in a very low voice—

“ If you are weary here—you may come to see me in Glasgow—once, twice, but not often——”

The rest of her words were lost, for she found herself once more folded in his arms, as he bade her good-bye, and kissed her.

“ Good-bye, Coquette, good-bye ! ” he said, tenderly ; and when she had gone some way across the moor, and turned and saw him still standing there, it seemed to her that she still heard him say “ Good-bye.” He waved a handkerchief to her ; it was as if he were on board a vessel standing out to sea, and that soon a great and desolate ocean would roll between them. When she got home, and went up into her own room, and looked out of the window, there was no figure visible on the wide expanse of the moor. There was nothing there but the sunshine and the quiet.

This was the first day that Coquette had known the joy of being loved ; and lo ! it was already empty. Fair and beautiful the morning had been—a day to be marked with a white stone in her memory ; but it was already numbered with the times that were. And the love that filled her heart—it was no gay and happy thing, to make her laugh and sing out of pure delight ; but an unrest and a care she was now to carry always with her, wondering whether its sweetness were as great as its pain.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

COQUETTE IN TOWN.

As Coquette and Lady Drum drew near to Glasgow the impatience of the girl increased. Her thoughts flew on more swiftly than the train ; and they were all directed towards the Whaup, whom she was now about to see. .

“ Will he be at the station ? Does he know we are

coming? Or shall we see him as we go along the streets?" she asked.

"Dear me!" said Lady Drum. "Ye seem to think that Glasgow is no bigger than Saltcoats. Meet him in the streets? We should scarce see him in the streets if he were dressed in scaurlet."

It was growing towards dusk when the two ladies arrived. Lady Drum's carriage was waiting at the station; and presently Coquette found herself in the midst of the roar and turmoil of the great city. The lamps on the bridges were burning yellow in the grey coldness of the twilight; and she caught a glimpse of the masses of shipping down in the dusky bed of the river. Then up through the busy streets—where the windows were growing bright with gas, and dense crowds of people were hurrying to and fro, and the carts, and waggons, and carriages were raising a din that was strange and bewildering to ears grown accustomed to the stillness of Airlic.

"Alas!" said Coquette, "I cannot see him in this crowd—it is impossible."

Lady Drum laughed, and said nothing. And so they drove on—the high, old-fashioned chariot, which ought to have been kept for state purposes down at Castle Cawmil, swinging gently on its big springs—up to the north-western districts of the city. When Coquette was finally set down in front of a range of tall houses, the rooms of which were shining ruddily through crimson curtains, she got up the steps, and turned to take a look at her new place of abode. Behold! in front of her there was no more city; but a great gulf of pale blue mist, with here and there an orange lamp burning in the distance. There were no more streets, nor crowds, nor great waggons; and she even became aware that there were trees in front of her, down there in the mysterious hollow.

"Where am I?" she said. "It is not a town—are we in the country again? And where is my cousin?"

At this moment the hall door was thrown open by a servant; and out of the blaze of light came a dapper and fat little gentleman, who, with some brief exclamation of welcome, darted down the steps and gave his arm to Coquette.

"Charmed to see you, Miss Cassilis," cried Sir Peter ; "hope you will have many a pleasant evening—many, and many, and many a pleasant evening. Yes, yes, yes, indeed !"

Then he was about to hand her over in his airy fashion to the young person who had been told off as her maid ; but Miss Coquette was rebellious.

"No," she said. "I do wish to go and see my cousin before anything ; he does not know I am in this town ; it will be good-natured of you, Sir Peter, to come with me."

"Oh, certainly ! certainly ! Roberts, hold on for a minute ! My lady, keep dinner to half-past eight. Come along, my dear. H'm ! Ha ! Ha-ha-ha !"

Lady Drum stood at the open door, amazed. Indeed, she was so astounded by this mad project on the part of her husband—within an hour of dinner-time—that she had not a word to say ; and in blank astonishment she beheld the carriage drive off. Once more Coquette found herself getting into a labyrinth of streets ; and the farther they drove the more noisy and dingy they seemed to become. She began to wonder if it was in this place that the Whaup had been living for so long a time, and how the thought of Airle and the wild moorland and the sea had not broken his heart.

It happens to most lads who go to college that they attach themselves to some friend and companion considerably older than themselves, who proceeds to act as their counsellor, teacher, and ally. Nothing of the kind was possible to the Whaup. His individuality was too strong to admit of any such submission. No sooner had he thrown himself into the midst of college life than his exuberant spirits, along with a touch of his old love of devilment, attracted round him a considerable circle of associates, of whom he was the heart and soul. It is to be feared that the Whaup and his friends did not form the most studious coterie to be found in the old High Street building. Plenty of study there was ; and the Whaup worked as hard as any of them ; but the wild evenings which these young gentlemen spent in their respective lodgings—the stories told of their daredevil pranks—and the very free-and-easy manners of more than one mother's son among them—gained for this band a dangerous reputation. They were held to be rather wild by the more discreet and methodical of their fellow-collegians. The Whaup himself was

known to stick at nothing. His splendid physique gave him many advantages ; and after having let daylight come in upon their rambling and hotheaded disquisitions on poetry or "metapheesies," on their too copious beer-drinking, and smoking of lengthy clays, many were chagrined to meet the Whaup in the forenoon as fresh and pink as a daisy, having just completed his morning classes, and setting out for a long swinging walk round by the Botanic Gardens and the Kelvin.

"What a powerful young fellow your cousin is," said Sir Peter, as they drove along George Street. "Did you hear of his adventure at the theatre? No? Good story; very good story; ho! ho! excellent story. He takes three young ladies to the theatre—cabman insults him—he hands the young ladies into the theatre, comes back, hauls the cabman down from his box and gives him a thorough thrashing in about a minute. Up comes another cabman, squares up, is sent flying into the arms of a policeman; the policeman admires pluck, and says it serves them both right. Your cousin goes into the theatre, sits down, nobody knows. Ho, ho! Ha, ha! Ha, ha!"

"But, pray, who were the young ladies?" asked Coquette, with a touch of proud asperity.

"Young ladies—young ladies—young ladies—who can remember the names of young ladies?" said, or rather hummed, Sir Peter, keeping time by tapping on the carriage window. "Why, I remember! Those charming girls that sing—what's the song?—why, the doctor's daughters, you know, Kate, and Mary, and Bess—all of them Menzies, Menzies, Menzies!"

"I think my cousin ought to attend to his studies, rather than go about with young ladies," said Coquette.

"So, ho!" cried Sir Peter. "Must a young man have no amusement? Suppose he caps his studies by marrying one of the doctor's daughters!"

"There are plenty to choose from," said Coquette, with an air of disdain.

Indeed, the mention of those three young ladies rendered Coquette silent for the rest of the drive; and Sir Peter was left to talk and hum to himself. Yet it was but a little time before that Coquette had clapped her hands with joy on

hearing that the Whaup had made those acquaintances, and that she had eagerly asked Lady Drum if it was probable he might marry one of them. Why should she suddenly feel jealous now, and refuse to speak to this poor Sir Peter, who was risking his dinner to do her a service?

Her face lightened considerably when the carriage was pulled up; and she got out to look with some curiosity on the gaunt and grey house in George Street, which bore a number she had often written on her letters. Many a time she had thought of this house, and mentally drawn a picture of it. But the picture she had drawn was of a small building with a porch, and green casements, and a big square in front, with trees in it—in short, she had thought of a quiet thoroughfare in an old-fashioned French town. She was more grieved than disappointed with the ugliness of this house.

Sir Peter led her along the entry, and up the stone stairs to the first landing. It was her first introduction to the Scotch system of building houses. But her attention was suddenly withdrawn from this matter by a considerable noise within; and over the noise there broke the music of a song, which was plentifully accompanied by rappings on a table or on the floor.

“Ah, c’est lui!” she suddenly cried. “I do know it is he.”

The Whaup, to tell the truth, had not a very beautiful voice; but it was strong enough; and both Sir Peter and Coquette could hear him carelessly shouting the words of an old English ballad—

Come lasses and lads, away from your dads,
And away to the maypole hie,
For every fair has a sweetheart there,
And the fiddlers standing by!
For Willy shall dance with Jane,
And Johnny has got his Joan,
To trip it, trip it, trip it, trip it, trip it up and down

—while there was a measured beating of hands and feet. Sir Peter had to knock twice before any one answered; and when the door was opened, lo! it was the Whaup himself who appeared—there being no one else in the house to perform this office.

"What ! is it you, Coquette !" he cried, seizing both her hands.

"Oh, you bad boy !" she cried. "How you do smell of tobacco !"

And, indeed, there came from the apartment he had just left—the door of which was also wide open—rolling volumes of smoke, which nearly took Sir Peter's breath away.

"But what am I to do with you ?" he said. "Mine is the only room in the house that isn't in confusion just now——"

"We will go in and see your friends, if you do not object, and if the gentlemen will permit us," said Coquette, at once. Perhaps she was desirous of knowing what company he kept.

You should have seen how swiftly those young men put away their pipes ; and how anxious they were to get Coquette a chair ; and how they strove to look very mild and good. You would have fancied they had been holding a prayer meeting ; but their manner changed perceptibly when Coquette hoped she had not interrupted their smoking, and graciously asked that the gentleman who had been singing should continue—at which there was much laughter, for the Whaup looked confused. It was in the midst of this re-awakening of voices that Sir Peter (who was beginning to feel uncomfortable about his dinner) explained the object of his visit, and asked the Whaup if he could come along later in the evening. Of course, his friends counselled him to go at once ; but he was not so lost to all notions of hospitality.

"No," said he ; "I will come and see you to-morrow night."

Coquette seemed hurt.

"Well," said her cousin to her, with a dash of his old impertinence, "you can stay here if you like, and let Sir Peter go home with an excuse for you."

The young men appeared as if they would have liked to second that invitation, but dared not. Indeed, they regarded Coquette—whose foreign accent they had noticed—in rather an awe-stricken way. Perhaps she was a French princess who had come on a visit to Sir Peter ; and she looked like a princess, and had the calm graciousness and self-possession of a princess. That was no blushing country

girl who sat there—the small lady with the delicate and pale features and the large, quiet, dark eyes, who had such a wonderful air of ease and refinement. The rough students felt their gaze fall when she looked at them. What would they not have given to have spoken with her for a whole evening, and looked at the wonders of her costume and the splendour of her dark hair?

“What do you say, Coquette?” said the Whaup; and they all pricked up their ears to hear her called by this strange name.

Coquette laughed. Doubtless she considered the proposal as a piece of her cousin’s raillery; but any one at all conversant with the secret likings of the young lady—as the Whaup was—must have known that she was perhaps not so averse to spending an evening with a lot of young students as she ought to have been.

“Perhaps I should like it,” she said, frankly, “if you did all sing to me—and tell stories—and make me one of your companions. But I am very hungry—I have had no dinner.”

“Bravely and sensibly spoken!” cried Sir Peter, who had become alarmed by this outrageous suggestion put forward by the Whaup. “Come along, my dear Miss Cassilis; your cousin will call and see you to-morrow night.”

“Good-bye, Tom,” said Coquette. “I am pleased you enjoy yourself in Glasgow. It is not all study and books—no? And now I understand why you did write to me such very short letters.”

“Look here, Coquette,” said he, as they were about to go. “What are you going to do to-morrow morning? I suppose you’ll be driving about, and visiting grand people, and you won’t have a word for me.”

“Ah, you wicked boy, to say that!” she said, reproachfully. “You will come for me to-morrow when you choose—nine, ten, eleven—and we will go for a walk just where you please; and I will speak to nobody but you; and you shall show me all the things worth seeing in Glasgow and round about.”

“Why, Coquette, it is all like a dream come true!” he cried. “And to think that you are in Glasgow at last!”

With that, Sir Peter offered the young lady his arm, and

hurried her down stairs. He was becoming more and more anxious about his dinner.

The Whaup returned to his companions, and instantly perceived that they were treating him with unusual respect. They *would* talk, also, about the young lady; and whether she was to remain long in Glasgow; and where the Whaup had seen her first; and whether she would likely be up at his rooms any other evening. Master Tom was not very communicative; but at last one ventured to say—

“Tell us, now, Cassilis, is she likely to be married soon?”

“She is,” said the Whaup.

“To whom?”

“To me,” said the Whaup.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ALL ABOUT KELVIN-SIDE.

TALK of Glasgow being a sombre grey city! When the Whaup got up next morning at half-past six, and looked out, it seemed to him that the empty pavements were made of gold; that the fronts of the houses were shining with a happy light; and the air full of a delicious tingling. For did not the great city hold in it the beating heart of Coquette; and were not all its thoroughfares aware of the consecration that had fallen on them by her arrival? Away he sped to his classes; and his boots, as they rang in the street, clattered “Coquette!” and “Coquette!” and “Coquette!” If the Professor had known that Coquette was in Glasgow, would he have looked so dull, and been so miserably slow? What was the use of this gabble about ancient languages, when Coquette had brought her pretty French idioms with her, and was even now getting up to look out on the greenness of Hillhead and down on the winding waters of the Kelvin. Alas! why were the half-hours so full of minutes; and might not the sunshine be altogether faded out of the sky before he could get westward to welcome Coquette?

He dashed home from college to his lodgings; and there arrayed himself in his tidiest garments; and freshened himself up, singing the while some snatches of “Sally in our Alley.” The tall and smart young man who now issued into

George Street, and made his way westward as fast as his long legs could carry him, bore but little resemblance to the devil-may-care lad who had lounged about Airlie and tormented his father's neighbours. Yet he was singing one of his boyish songs as he strode along the thoroughfares; and ever and anon he looked up at the sky to make sure that it was going to be kindly to Coquette. Why, the light mist of the morning was now clearing away, and a blaze of sunshine was striking here and there along the northern side of Sauchiehall Street. 'Tis a pleasant street—under certain circumstances. Shops are its landmarks; but they grow poetic in the eyes of youth. It seemed to the Whaup that the boots in the windows looked unusually elegant; that never before had he seen such taste in the arrangement of Normandy pippins; that even the odour of a bakery had something in it that touched sweet memories. For, indeed, the shops and the windows, and the people, and Sauchiehall Street itself, were to him on that morning but phantasms; and all around him, the air, and the sky, and the sunshine, were full of Coquette, and nothing but Coquette. He fell in love with Sauchiehall Street on that morning; and he has never quite forgotten his old affection.

He walked up to the front of the great house overlooking the Park, which Sir Peter had borrowed; and was glad that the door was opened by a girl instead of by a man-servant—a creature whom he half feared and half disliked. The young person had scarcely shown him into the spacious drawing-room when he heard a quick flutter of a dress, and Coquette herself came rushing in, overwhelming him with her questions, and her exclamations, and her looks. For she could not understand what had altered him so much until she perceived that his moustache, which had been almost invisible on their last meeting, had now assumed quite formidable proportions; and it was only a significant threat on his part that caused her to cease her grave and ironical compliments.

And where should they go on this bright summer morning?

“Lady Drum, she has gone into the town to order flowers for the grand dinner of Friday,” said Coquette; “to which you are invited, Mr. Whaup, by a card which I did

address for you this morning. And I would not go with her ; for I said—my cousin comes for me, and he would be angry if I were not here, and he is very disagreeable when he is angry. *Enfin*, let us go, and you will amuse me by all that is to be seen.”

Now when Coquette had got herself ready, and they went out, the Whaup took a very strange road to the city by going down to Kelvin Bridge. The farther they went—over by Hillhead and still westward—the less appearance there was of streets and shops ; until the Whaup had to confess that he had led her, of set purpose, directly away from the town. And so they went into the country.

He took her into all the haunts and nooks that he had explored by himself—down to the Pear-tree Well—back again, and along the Kelvin, and then up by the cross road which leads to Maryhill. Here they paused in their wanderings to look over the great extent of country which lay before them ; and the Whaup told her, that far away on the left, if she had a wonderful telescope, she might see the lonely uplands about Airlie, and catch a glimpse of the long sweep of the sea.

“I used to come up here,” he said, “all by myself, and wonder what you were doing away down there. And when the sun came out, I thought—‘Ah, Coquette is happy now.’”

“All that is very pretty,” said Coquette ; “and I should be sorry for you, perhaps. But I do find you have still some amusement. What is it you sing—‘Come, lasses and lads, away from your dads’ ? What is dads ?”

“Never mind, Coquette. It is only a song to keep up one’s heart, you know—not to be talked about on a morning like this, between us two. I want to say something very nice to you, and friendly, and even sentimental ; but I don’t know how. What shall I say ?”

“It is not for me to tell you,” remarked Coquette, with some air of disdain.

And yet, as they stood there, and looked over the far country towards Airlie and the sea, they somehow forgot to talk. Indeed, as Coquette, leaning on the low stone wall, gazed away westward, a shadow seemed to cross her face. Was she thinking of all that had happened there, and of her present position—mayhap working grievous wrong by this

thoughtless kindness to her cousin? Was she right in trying to atone for previous neglect by an excess of goodness which might be cruel to him in after-life? Her companion saw that a sudden silence and pensiveness had fallen over her, and he drew her gently away, and began their homeward walk.

On their way back, they again went down to the Kelvin; and he proposed that they should rest for a little while in the bit of meadow opposite the Pear-tree Well. They sat down amid the long grass; and when any one crossed the small wooden bridge, which was but seldom, Coquette hid her face under her sunshade, and was unseen.

"Are you tired?" said the Whaup.

"Tired? No. I do walk about all day sometimes at Airlie."

"Then why have you grown so silent?"

"I have been thinking."

"Of what?"

"Of many things—I do not know."

"Coquette," he said suddenly, "do you know that the well over there used to be a trysting place for lovers; and that they used to meet there and join their hands over the well, and swear that they would marry each other some day? I suppose some did marry and some didn't; but wasn't it very pleasant in the meantime to look forward? Coquette, if you would only give me your hand now! I will wait any time—I have waited already, Coquette; but if you will only say now that I may look forward to some day, far away, that I can come and remind you of your promise—think what it would be to have that to carry about with one. You will be going back to Airlie, Coquette—I may not see you for ever so long."

He paused; for she seemed strangely disturbed. She looked up at him with eyes which were wild and alarmed.

"Ah, do not say any more," she said. "I will do anything for you, but not that—not that."

And then she said, a moment afterwards, in a voice which was very low and full of sadness—

"Or see; I will promise to marry you, if you like, after many, many years—only not now—not within a few years—afterwards I will do what you like."

"But have I offended you? Why do you cry, Coquette? Look here, I'd cut my fingers off before I would ask anything of you that pained you. What is the matter, Coquette? Does it grieve you to think of what I ask?"

"No—no!" she said, hurriedly, with tears stealing down her face. "It is right of you to ask it—and I—I must say yes. My uncle does expect it, does he not? And you yourself, Tom, you have been very good to me, and if only this will make you happy, I will be your wife."

"You will?" said he, with his handsome face burning with joy.

"But—but—" said Coquette, with the dark eyes still wet, and her head bent down, "not until after many years. And all that time, Tom, I shall pray that you may get a better wife than I—and a wife who could be to you all that you deserve—and in this long time you may meet some one, and your heart will say, 'She is better for me than Coquette'——"

"Better than you, Coquette!" he cried. "Is there anybody in all the world better than you?"

"Ah, you do not think—you do not remember. You do not know anything of me yet—I am a stranger to you—and I have been brought up differently from you. And did not Leesiebess say I had come to do mischief among you—and that my French bringing-up was dangerous?——"

"But you know, Coquette, that your goodness even turned the heart of that horrible old idiot towards you; and you must not say another word against yourself, for I will not believe it. And if you only knew how proud and happy you have made me!" he added, taking her hand affectionately and gratefully.

"I am glad of that," said Coquette, in a low voice. "You deserve to be very happy. But it is a great many years off, and in that time I will tell you more of myself than I have told you yet. I cannot just now, my poor boy, for your eyes are so full of gladness; but some day you will believe it fortunate for you if you can marry some one else—and I will rejoice at that too."

"Why," said he, with some good-natured surprise in his voice, "you talk as if there was some one *you* wanted to marry!"

‘No,’ said Coquette, with a sigh, ‘there is no one.’

‘And now, then,’ said the Whaup gaily, as he assisted her to rise, ‘I call upon all the leaves of the trees, and all the drops in the river, and all the light in the air, to bear witness that I have won Coquette for my wife; and I ask the sky always to have sunshine for her; and I ask the winds to take care of her and be gentle to her; for isn’t she my Coquette?’

‘Ah, you foolish boy!’ she said, with sad and tearful eyes. ‘You have given me a dangerous name. But no matter. If it pleases you to-day to think I shall be your wife, I am glad.’

Of course, in lover’s fashion, he laughed at her fears, and strove to lend her a leaven of his own high-hearted confidence. And in this wise they returned to Glasgow, as lovers have done before them, as lovers will do after them again and again, so long as youth hungers for bright eyes, and laughs to scorn all the perils the future may enfold. And if the Whaup thought well of Glasgow on that morning when he set out, you may guess what he thought of the city as he now returned to it, and of the strange transfiguration undergone by the distant clouds of smoke, and the tall chimneys, and the long and monotonous streets. Romance had bathed the old grey town in the hues of the sunset; and for him henceforth Glasgow was no longer a somewhat commonplace and matter-of-fact mass of houses, but a realm of mystery and dreams which love had lit up with the coloured lime-light of wonder and hope.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

LADY DRUM’S DINNER-PARTY.

So Coquette had engaged herself to marry her cousin. She knew not why, but there were strange forebodings crowding her mind as she contemplated that as yet distant prospect. It seemed to her that life would be a pleasant and enjoyable thing, if all the people around her were satisfied to leave it as they found it, and to continue those amicable relations which were quieter, safer, more comfortable than the wild and strange perplexities which appeared to follow

in the train of love. Love had become a fearful thing to her. She looked forward to meeting Lord Earlshope with something like alarm; and yet his absence was a source of vague unrest and anxiety. She longed to see him; and yet dreaded a repetition of those bizarre and terrible scenes which had marked the opening days of their intimacy. And the more she looked at her own position—the longer she dwelt on the possibilities that lay before her in the future—the less could she unravel the toils that seemed gathering around her and binding her with iron chains.

Was this, then, the happy phase of life into which she had seen, with something of envy, her old companions and play-mates enter? Was this the delight of being in love? Were these the joyous experiences which were sung in many a ballad, and described in many a merry theatre-piece, and dwelt tenderly upon in many a story?

"I am eighteen," she said to herself, in these solitary musings. "It is the time for young people to be in love; and yet I hate it and fear it; and I wish that I did never come to this country. Alas! it is too late to go away now."

And again she asked herself if she had brought those perils—now looming distinctly in the future—upon herself by her own fault. Wherein had she erred? Surely not through selfishness. She loved Lord Earlshope, and was content to be loved by him, without even dreaming that he was thereby bound to her in any shape whatever. Indeed she seemed to think that by way of reparation it was her duty to marry her cousin; and she had consented only because she thought she would make him happy. In neither direction was there the least regard for herself, but only a desire to please her friends all round; and yet it appeared as if those very efforts of hers were doomed to plunge her deeper and deeper into the sea of troubles in which she found herself sinking. Was there no hand to save her? She knew not how it had all come about; but she did know that, in the odd moments in which a consciousness of her situation flashed upon her, a vague terror took possession of her, and she looked forward with dismay to the coming years.

These moments, fortunately, occurred at considerable intervals. The temperament of the girl was naturally light and cheerful. She was glad to enjoy the quiet pleasures of

everyday life, and forget those gloomy anxieties which lay in the future. And this visit to Glasgow was full of all manner of new experiences, delights, excitements, which drove her forebodings out of her head, and led the Whaup to believe that she was proud to have become his affianced wife. Why had she cried, he asked himself, when he urged his suit in that bit of meadow on the banks of the Kelvin? It did not matter. The Whaup was not himself inclined to morbid speculation. Doubtless, girls were strange creatures. They cried when they were most pleased. They turned pale, or fainted, or achieved some other extraordinary feat, on the smallest emotional provocation. It was enough for him to hear Coquette's merry laugh to convince him that she was not very sorry for what she had done; and everybody, from Lady Drum downwards, bore testimony to the fact that the visit to Glasgow had wonderfully improved the girl's health and spirits. You had only to look at the new and faint colour in her pale cheeks, and at the glad brightness of her eyes.

Then there was the grand dinner coming off, which was to introduce Coquette to Lady Drum's Glasgow friends. The Whaup, of course, was invited; and, as there never had been occasion for his wearing evening dress down in Airlie, his slender store of money was deeply dipped into by his preparations. But when his name was announced, and he walked into the drawing-room, where Lady Drum was receiving her guests, the appearance of the tall and handsome young man attracted a good many eyes; and Coquette—who had gone quickly forward to meet him—was quite overcome by wonder and delight over his transformation from a raw country lad into an elegant young gentleman, and could not refrain from saying as much to him in a whisper. The Whaup—who had looked round for her on his entrance into the room—laughed, and blushed a little, and then drew her away into a corner, and said—

"It is all the white tie, Coquette, isn't it? Don't you think I've managed it well? But I am awfully afraid that a sneeze would send everything flying, and fill the air with bits of cambric. And it was very good of you, Coquette, to send me those studs—don't they look pretty?—and I'll kiss you for sending me them whenever I get the chance."

With which Coquette drew herself up, and said—

“You do talk of kissing me as if it were every day. Yet you have not kissed me, nor are likely to do that, until you are a great deal better-behaved, and less vain of yourself. You do talk of not being able to sneeze, merely that I look at the negligent way you have made your necktie and your collar—to open your throat, you foolish boy, and give yourself a cold.”

At this moment Sir Peter bustled up to get hold of Coquette, and introduce to her certain civic dignitaries; and the Whaup, with some chagrin, saw her disappear in a crowd of people. He himself was speedily recalled to his duty, for the remainder of the guests were arriving rapidly, and among them were some whom he knew. He soon found himself being teased by the daughters of his friend, Dr. Menzies—three tall, light-haired, merry-hearted girls—who rather made a pet of him. And all at once one of them said to him—

“Why, is that your cousin there—the girl in white, with the heap of tea-roses? It is? How handsome she is; and how well she knows the proper sort of flower for her dark hair! Did you say she was an Italian?”

“No—a Mongolian,” said the Whaup emphatically; for he did not like to have Coquette spoken of by anybody in that cool and critical fashion.

“Does she sing?”

“I should think so,” he said, curtly.

At this very moment Coquette came towards him; and then—seeing that he was talking to three young ladies—suddenly turned, and looked for Sir Peter, whom she had just left. The Whaup was at her side in a moment.

“What is it, Coquette?” he said.

“Nothing,” she said, coldly.

“You know you were coming to speak to me.”

“But I did find you engaged,” she said, with a slight touch of *hauteur* in her tone. “Who are these young ladies? Are they your friends whose father is the doctor? Why do you leave them?”

“Coquette, if you are unreasonable I will go away and not return the whole evening. What did you come to tell me?”

"I did come to say," replied Coquette, speaking with a studied and calm carelessness, "that Lady Drum has asked Bailie Maclaren (I do think that is the name) to take me in to dinner, and I do not like it, for I would rather have sat by you, but it is of no consequence since you are occupied with your friends."

"Ho, ho!" said the Whaup confidently;—"Lady Drum asked me to take in that old woman with the feathers, Mrs. Colquhoun; but don't you imagine I am such a fool, Coquette—oh, no!"

"What will you do?" said Coquette, with her face brightening up.

The Whaup said nothing for a second or two, but just then, a motion towards pairing having taken place, he darted up to Bailie Maclaren—a venerable person in spectacles, who was looking out for his appointed partner—and said in a hurried whisper—

"I beg your pardon, sir, but Lady Drum bids me tell you she would be much obliged if you would kindly take in Mrs. Colquhoun—the old lady near the piano—do you see her?"

The Whaup did not wait for any reply from the bewildered old gentleman, but instantly returned to Coquette, caught her hand, placed it on his arm, and hurried her into the dining-room in defiance of all order and the laws of precedence. Not for some time did Lady Drum notice what had occurred. It was not until the soup had been served that she caught a glimpse of Coquette and the Whaup sitting comfortably together at a portion of the table where neither ought to have been; and the face of the young lady, who wore tea-rosebuds twisted in the loose masses of her dark hair, was particularly bright and happy; for her companion was telling her wonderful stories of his college life—lies, doubtless, for the most part, or nearly approaching thereunto.

"It was rather shabby of you, Coquette," he said, "to run away like that when I wanted to introduce you to Dr. Menzies' girls."

"I was introduced to too many people—I cannot remember all such names. Besides, I do not like girls with straw-coloured hair."

"Oh, for shame, Coquette! You know it isn't straw-

colour but golden, and very pretty. Well, I would have introduced you to those two young ladies who sit near Sir Peter, and who have hair as dark and as handsome as your own."

"Who are they?" said Coquette submissively; for she was bound to be consistent.

"They live in Regent's Park Terrace," said the Whaup—which did not afford his companion much information—"and they have the most beautiful contralto voices. You should hear the younger one sing the 'Ash Grove.'"

"I do think you know too many young ladies," said Coquette, with a pout,—which was so obviously assumed, that he laughed at her; and then she was offended; and then he had humbly to apologise; and then they were friends again.

So the dinner went on, and these two young people were very happy; for it was the first time that the Whaup had appeared in society along with Coquette, and he felt a right of property in her, and was proud of her. She had given him to understand that their marriage was a thing so distant and vague that it was scarcely to be thought of as yet; but in the meantime he regarded her as virtually his wife, and no longer considered himself a solitary unit lost in this crowd of married people. He was very attentive to Coquette. He was particular as to the dainties which she ate; he assumed authority over her in the matter of wine. Why, it was as if they were children playing at being husband and wife—in a fantastic grotto of their own creation; while the serious interests of the world were allowed to pass outside unheeded, and they cared not to think of any future, so busy were they in wreathing flowers.

"Coquette," said he, "if you are good, I will sing you a song when we go into the drawing-room."

"I do know," said Coquette, with the least trace of contempt. "It is always 'Come lasses and lads—Come lasses and lads'—that is your song always. Now, if you did sing some proper song, I would play an accompaniment for you. But perhaps some of your young lady friends down there—can they play the accompaniment for you?"

"Oh, yes," said the Whaup lightly. "But, of course,

none of them can play or sing like you, you know. Now if you only saw yourself at this moment, Coquette—how your white dress, and the glare from the table, and the strong lights, make your hair and your eyes look so dark as to be almost wild—and those pretty yellow rosebuds——”

“Have I not told you,” said Coquette, with some asperity, “that it is very, very bad manners to mention one’s appearance or dress? I did tell you often—you must not do it; and if people do hear you call me Coquette, what will they say of me?”

“Go on,” said the Whaup, mockingly; “let us have all the lecture at once!”

“Ah,” said Coquette, more sadly than she had as yet spoken, “there is another thing I would say—and yet of what use? I would wish you to give up thinking me so good and so perfect. Why do you think I can play, or sing, or talk to you better than any one else? It is not true—it is a great misfortune that you think it true. And if it was anybody but you, I would say it was compliments only—it was flattery; but I do see in your eyes what you think, although you may not say it. Do you know that you deceive yourself about me—and that it is a pain to me? If I could give you my eyes for a moment, I would take you round the table, and show you who is much prettier than I am—who does sing better—who has more knowledge—more sense—more nobleness. Alas! you can see nobody but me; and it is a misfortune.”

“What do you mean by that, Coquette?” he said, with vague alarm. “Why do you want me to look at people with different eyes?”

“Because,” she said, in a low voice, but very distinctly, “you do risk all your happiness on a future so uncertain. When I look forward to a few years, I am afraid—not for myself, but for you. If I could give you my eyes, I would lead you to some one of your friends and bid you admire her, and teach you what a charming character she has, and ask you to pledge her to go with you all through the time that is to come. As for me—I am not sure of myself. Why did they call me Coquette? When I do think of all that you risk in giving your happiness to me to keep for a great many years—I—I—I despair!”

But the Whaup was not to be cast down by these idle forebodings.

"Why, Coquette," said he, "you are become as morbid as Lord Earlshope, and you talk nonsense besides, which he never does. You want me to believe that anybody else, in this room or any other room, is to be compared with you. That is not giving me new eyes—it is blinding me with a pair of spectacles. And I won't have your eyes, Coquette—pretty as they are—but yourself, eyes included. Why, what a small idiot you must be to imagine that the world holds more than one Coquette!"

His companion smiled—perhaps rather sadly.

"It is a great change from your first belief of me—when you did think me dangerous and wicked. But perhaps they do still think that of me in Airie. What would Leesiebeth's husband answer to those pretty things you say of me—and are you so sure that all the people there are wrong, and you are right?"

Sure that Coquette was not a wicked and dangerous person?—the Whaup had not a word to say.

CHAPTER XL.

THE ROSEBUD.

WHEN the ladies had gone from the room, and the men had settled down to port-wine and after-dinner talk, the Whaup sat by himself, silent and gloomy. A glass of claret remained on the table before him untasted. He stared at it as if it were some distant object; and the hum of the voices around him sounded like the murmur of the wind, as he had listened to it at night up on Airie moor.

What did Coquette mean? Why did she put away into the future, as if it were something to be dreaded, the happy time which ought to have been welcomed by a young girl? As the Whaup puzzled over these things, he asked himself what hindered his going to her now, in the royal fashion of Lochinvar, and marrying her out-of-hand before she had time to say no?

Alas! Lochinvar belonged to the upper classes. He

could support the bride whom he stole away in that romantic manner ; and his merry black eye, in bewitching the girl, and making her ready to ride with him over the Border, was not troubled by any consideration as to how the two should be able to live. The Whaup looked up the table. There were rich men there. There were men there who could confidently place fabulous figures on cheques ; and yet they did not seem to know what a magic power they possessed. They only talked feeble platitudes about foreign affairs ; and paid further attention to that god which, enshrined in the capacious temple underneath their waistbelt, they had worshipped for many years. Had they ever been young ? the Whaup asked himself. Had they known some fair creature who resembled, in some inferior fashion, Coquette ? Was there at that remote period anybody in the world, in the likeness of Coquette, on whom their wealth could shower little delicate attentions ? Had they been able to marry when they chose ? Or were they poor in their youth—when alone money is of value to any one—only to become rich in their old age, and think with a sigh of the Coquette of long ago, and console themselves with much feeding and the imposing prominence of a portly stomach ?

Dr. Menzies, it is true, had vaguely promised that, when his studies were completed, the Whaup should become his assistant, or even his junior partner. But how far away seemed that dim prospect ! And why should Coquette—a princess on whom all the world ought to have been proud to wait—be bound down by such ignominious conditions and chances ? The Whaup plunged his hands deep into his empty pockets, and stared all the more moodily at his glass.

Then suddenly there was a sound of a piano—a bright, sharp prelude which he seemed to know. Presently, too, he heard as through muffled curtains the distant voice of Coquette ; and what was this she was singing ? Why, that brisk old ballad of his own that she had heard him sing in his lodgings. Where had she got it ? How had she learnt it ? The Whaup started to his feet—all the gloom gone from his face. He stole out of the room—in the hubbub of vinous political fervour he was scarcely

noticed—and made his way to the drawing-room door. This was what he heard—

Come lasses and lads, get leave of your dads,
And away to the maypole lie,
For every fair has a sweetheart there,
And the fiddlers standing by!
For Willy shall dance with Jane,
And Johnny has got his Joan,
To trip it, trip it, trip it, &c.

Coquette, then, was in no melancholy mood? Why, what an ass he had been, to grow dismal when there still remained to him the proud possession of that promise of hers! That was his own song she was singing brightly and merrily, and with strange oddities of pronunciation. She herself belonged to him in a manner—and who was there that would not envy him? When the song was finished, the Whaup went into the room, walked up to the piano, sat down by Coquette, and told her that he knew nobody among the men, and had been forced to come in there.

“And where did you get that song, Coquette?” he asked.

“Monsieur!” observed Coquette, “you do talk as if you had the right to be here—which you have not. Do you not see that your friends, the doctor’s young ladies, did laugh when you came in and walked over to me!”

“Where should I go, Coquette?”

“I will tell you,” she answered in a low voice, as she pretended to turn over the music. “When at the dinner, I did see the youngest of the three young ladies look much at you. I have spoken to her since we came here. She is charming—and oh! very good, and speaks kindly of you, and with a little blush, which is very pretty on your Scotch young ladies. And when I asked her if she knows this song, she did laugh and blush a little again—you have been singing it to her——”

“Oh, Coquette!” he said. “What a sly mouse you are—for all your innocent eyes—to be watching everybody like that.”

“But now you go to her, and sit down there, and make yourself very agreeable. You do not know how much she is a friend of yours.”

The Whaup began to lose his temper.

"I won't be goaded into speaking to anybody," said he; "and the first thing you have to do, Miss Coquette, to-morrow morning, is to come to a distinct understanding about all the nonsense you have been talking at dinner. What is it all about, Coquette? Are you proud? Then I will coax you and flatter you. Are you frightened? Then I will laugh at you. Are you unreasonable? Then—then, by Jingo, I'll run away with you!"

Coquette laughed lightly; and the Whaup became aware that several pairs of eyes had been drawn towards them.

"This place is getting too hot for me," he said. "Must I really go back?"

"No," she said; "you will stop and sing—something bright, joyful, happy—and you will forget the melancholy things we have been talking about. Have I been unkind to you? You will see I will make it up, and you shall not sit gloomy again at dinner. Besides, it does not improve your good looks: you should be more of the wild boy that I saw when I did first come to Airlie."

"I wish we were both back at Airlie, in those old times!" said the Whaup.

Coquette looked at him with some surprise. She had caught quite a new tone of sadness in his voice, and his eyes had grown absent and clouded.

So he, too, was striving to pierce that unknown future, and seemed bewildered by its vagueness and its gloom? The seriousness of life appeared to have told on him strangely since he left the quiet moorland village. What had wrought the change within the brief space of time that had elapsed since her arrival from France? Was she the cause of it all?—she, who was willing to sacrifice her own life without a murmur for the happiness of those whom she loved? Already, the first months of her stay at Airlie—despite the petty persecutions and little trials she had to endure—had become an idyllic period towards which she looked back with eyes filled with infinite longing.

All that evening she was the prominent figure in Lady Drum's drawing-room. When the men came in from their port wine and politics, they found that Coquette had established herself as a sort of princess, and they only swelled the number of those who formed her court. But

upon two, only, of those present did she bestow a marked favour ; and these were the Whaup and the youngest of Dr. Menzies' daughters. She so managed that the three of them were generally close together, engaged in all manner of private confabulation. The fair-haired young girl had approached with a certain diffidence and awe this queenly small woman, whom everybody seemed to be talking about ; but Coquette had only to smile, and begin to speak a little in her foreign way, in order to win over the soft-hearted young Scotch girl. These three appeared, indeed, to form a group in the nebulous crowd of people who chatted, or drank tea, or listened to the music ; and before the evening was over Coquette had conveyed to Miss Menzies—by that species of esoteric telegraphy known to women—a series of impressions which certainly neither had remotely mentioned.

“Coquette,” said the Whaup, when all the people had gone but himself, and as he was bidding her good-night, “why did you try to make Mary Menzies believe that she and I were much greater companions, and all that sort of thing, than you and I ? You always talked as if you were the third person talking to us two.”

“It is too late for questions,” said Coquette, with a mingled air of sauciness and gentleness. “You must go away now, and do not forget you go with me to the theatre to-morrow evening—and if you do send me some flowers I will put them in my hair.”

“I wish you would give me one just now,” he said, rather shyly.

She took a pale-tinted tea-rose out of her bosom and kissed it lightly (for Sir Peter was just then coming along the hall), and gave it him. The rose was a great consolation to the Whaup on his homeward way. And were not the constant stars overhead—shining so calmly, and clearly, and happily, that they seemed to rebuke his anxious forebodings ?

“She is as pure as a star,” he said to himself, “and as beautiful—and as far away. The years she talks of seem to stretch on and on ; and I cannot see the end of them. The stars up there are far nearer to me than Coquette is.”

Yet he held the rose in his hand, and she had kissed it.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE WHAUP BECOMES ANXIOUS.

COQUETTE'S stay in Glasgow did not promise well for the Whaup's studies. On the very morning after she had given him a rose to cheer him on his homeward walk, he was again up at Lady Drum's house. He looked very blank, however, on being shown into a room, to find that venerable lady the sole occupant ; and he saw by the shrewd and good-natured smile on her face that she perceived his disappointment.

"Yes, she is out," said Lady Drum. "Is that the question ye would ask?"

"Well, it is, to tell you the truth," said the Whaup.

"Could ye expect her to bide in the house on a morning like this? If there is a glint o' sunshine to be seen anywhere she is off and out like a butterfly before we have breakfast over."

"Young ladies ought not to go out alone like that," said the Whaup, who had suddenly acquired serious and even gloomy notions of propriety.

His elderly friend took him to the window. Before them lay the long terraces of the Park, the deep valley, the trees, the river, and the opposite heights, all dully radiant in a pallid and smoky sunshine. And on the terrace underneath the window there was a bench ; and on the bench sat, all by herself, a young person, whose downcast face, bent over a book, was hidden underneath a white sunshade ; and there was nothing at all by which to distinguish the stranger but her faintly yellow morning dress, that shone palely in the sun. Yet you should have seen how swiftly the Whaup's face cleared. In about thirty seconds he had taken an unceremonious farewell of Lady Drum, and hastened down into the Park.

"You must not come to see me every day," said Coquette ; "you do give up all your work."

"But look here, Coquette," he remarked, gravely, "isn't it the proper thing to pay a visit of ceremony after a dinner-party?"

“At ten o’clock in the morning?” she said, with a smile; “four o’clock is the time for such calls, and it is not to me you pay them.”

He made no reply; but he drew away the book from her lap, and quietly shut it and put it in his pocket. Then he said—

“We are going to have a stroll through the Botanic Gardens.”

So she surrendered herself—her only protest being a well-simulated sigh, at which he laughed—and away they went. Glasgow College, and all its class rooms, might have been in the Philippine Islands for anything that the Whaup remembered of them.

Many and many a time during this long and devious saunter, which took them a good deal farther than the Botanic Gardens, the Whaup—yielding to that strange dissatisfaction with their present happiness which distinguishes lovers and fills the most beatific period of human life with trouble—would drag back their rambling talk to the reasons Coquette had for being apprehensive of the future. Why was she disinclined to speak of a possible limit to the number of years he had yet to wait? Why did she almost pathetically counsel him to fix his affections on some one else?

Coquette replied gravely, and sometimes a little sadly, to these questions; but she had not the courage to reveal to him the whole truth. There was something so touching in the very trust that he reposed in her—in the frank and generous way that he appealed to her, and took it for granted that she would become his wife—that, in the meantime, she dared not tell him that her heart still wandered away to another man. He did not know that his protestations of love sounded coldly in her ears; and only suggested what they would have been had they been uttered by another. He thought it strange that she was glad to avoid those little confessions and wondering hopes which are the common talk of lovers; and would far rather have him speak to her about his professional future, or even the details of his college life.

For herself, she seemed to think it enough if her cousin were pleased to walk with her; and some day, she doubted

not, she would yield to his urgent wishes and become his wife. By that time, was it not likely that the strange unrest in her heart, that vague longing for the presence of one whose name she scarcely ever mentioned, would have died utterly away? And in the remote possibility of her giving herself to her cousin, was it not her duty now to try to eradicate that hapless love which had far more of pain than of pleasure in it? While the Whaup was eagerly sketching out the life which he and she should live together, Coquette was trying to make up her mind never again to see Lord Earlshope.

But it was a hard trial. A woman may marry this man or that man—her affections may shift and alter—but she never forgets the man she loved with all the wonder, and idealism, and devotion of a girl's early love. Coquette asked herself whether she could ever forget Airlie, and the stolen interviews of those spring mornings, and the pathetic farewells that the sea, and the sky, and the shining landscape alone knew.

"Dreaming again," said the Whaup, gently. "I suppose you don't know that that is a river you are looking at?"

They were standing on the small wooden bridge that crosses the Kelvin; and she was gazing into the water as if it were a mirror on which all the future years were reflected.

"Does this river go to the sea?" she asked.

"Most rivers do," replied the Whaup—proud, like a man, of his superior scientific knowledge.

"And perhaps in a day or two it will see Arran."

"Why, you speak as if you were already anxious to leave Glasgow and go back," said the Whaup. "What amusement can there be for you there? My father is buried in that Concordance. Lady Drum is here. Earlshope is deserted—by the way, I wonder what has become of Lord Earlshope."

"Let us go," said Coquette, hastily; and she took her arm off the wooden parapet of the bridge, and went on. The Whaup did not perceive that his mention of Lord Earlshope's name had struck a jarring note.

So they walked leisurely in to Glasgow again; and all the way Coquette skilfully avoided conversation about the

matters which were naturally uppermost in her companion's mind. Indeed, a discovery which she made greatly helped her out of the dilemma, and enlivened the remainder of their ramble. She inadvertently slipped into French in making some remark ; and the Whaup quickly replied to her in the same tongue. She was surprised and delighted beyond measure. She had no idea of his having studied hard since he left Airlie to extend the small acquaintance with the language which he had picked up as a boy. She saw well what had urged him to do so ; and she was pleased by this occult compliment. She insisted on their talking nothing but French all the way home ; and the Whaup—with occasional stammering, laughing, and blushing—managed to sustain the conversation with tolerable ease and fluency. She corrected his idioms—very gently, it is true ; and also hinted that he might, if he liked, adopt the familiar *tutoiement* which ought to exist between cousins.

"But I can't," said the Whaup. "My conversation books have taught me to say *vous* ; and so, until I learn, you must call me *tu*, and I will call you anything that comes uppermost."

This, and all that followed, was spoken in rough-and-ready French, the grammar of which was a good deal better than its pronunciation ; and the care which the Whaup had to bestow on his language lent an unromantic and matter-of-fact character to the subjects of their talk, to Coquette's great relief.

When they had reached the house she said—

"You must come in and make an apology to Lady Drum for your inattention. Then you will have a little lunch. Then you will go home and attend to your studies until the evening. Then you will come here and go with us to the theatre ; and you may bring a bouquet for Lady Drum, if you choose."

"Any more commands, Coquette ?" he said. "What, nothing more ? How many lines of Greek must I do if I am disobedient ?"

"You must not be rude to me," she remarked, "because that is a trace of your bringing-up at Airlie, which you have nearly forgotten. It is a relic of your savage nature. You are much improved ; you are almost civilised."

"Yes," said the Whaup, "I saw a cart of turnips go by yesterday quite unprotected from behind, and I did not steal one. . . . Hillo! who is that sitting with Lady Drum at the window?"

Coquette looked up, and did not betray the least emotion, although a sharp spasm shot across her heart.

"It is Lord Earlshope, is it not?" she said, in a low voice.

"Yes," said the Whaup, with a sudden coldness in his tone, and returning at once to his English; "it is rather singular he should come here just now, but that is his own affair. No one ever could tell what he would do next. Coquette, I don't think I shall go into the house just now—you make my excuses to Lady Drum."

"Very well," said Coquette, calmly.

She held out her hand to bid him good-bye. He was surprised. He expected she would have insisted on his going into the house; and, on the contrary, she seemed rather relieved that he was going away.

"What is the matter, Coquette?" he asked. "Are you vexed because I am going away? Very well—I will go in—come along."

And with that, he went up the steps; but he could not tell by her face whether or not she had been annoyed by his wishing to go. They entered the house together. Lord Earlshope rose as they went into the room, and stepped forward to meet Coquette; and the Whaup watched the manner in which she advanced to shake hands with him. Why were her eyes cast down, and her face a trifle pale? She answered in almost an inaudible way the kindly inquiries which Lord Earlshope—whose demeanour was quite unconstrained, frank, and courteous—made as to her having enjoyed her visit to Glasgow. The Whaup himself, in shaking hands with his rival, was constrained to admit that there was something pleasant and friendly in Earlshope's manner, and in the look of his clear light-blue eye, which rather disarmed suspicion. In a very few minutes the Whaup had completely thawed, and was laughing heartily at a letter sent by Mr. Gillespie, the schoolmaster, which Lord Earlshope read aloud to Lady Drum.

Nevertheless, as he went to his lodgings he was con-

siderably disquieted. He did not like leaving Lord Earlshope in the company of Coquette. It seemed to him an infringement of that right of property which he had acquired by her promise. In the old days he was vaguely jealous, and was inclined to be rudely suspicious of Coquette's small prevarications; but his jealousy and his rudeness were readily dissipated whenever he came under the influence of Earlshope's good nature, or of Coquette's gentle solicitude. Now he had a still better claim to look after her. Had he not sworn in the olden time to take care of her, and be her champion? Alas! the Whaup had yet to learn that a woman is best left to take care of herself in such delicate matters; and that no guard can be placed on the capricious wanderings of her affection.

CHAPTER XLII.

AT THE THEATRE.

LORD EARLSHOPE and Lady Drum had been carelessly chatting at the window when the Whaup and Coquette drew near. They saw them walking up the slopes of the Park to the house, and Earlshope said—

“What a handsome fellow Tom Cassilis has grown! I have never seen any young fellow alter so rapidly.”

“Has he not?” said Lady Drum, with a little touch of pride—for she fancied that both these young people somehow belonged to her. “I should like to see them married.”

It is possible that this artless confession on the part of the old lady was put out as a feeler. She liked Tom Cassilis well enough; but, being mortal and a woman, she must have wondered sometimes whether Coquette might not wed a lord—especially a lord who had frequently betrayed his admiration for her. But, when she said this, Earlshope betrayed no surprise. He merely said—

“They will make a handsome pair; and many a man will envy young Cassilis his good fortune.”

Lady Drum was a trifle disappointed. Was there no mystery at all, then, connected with those romantic episodes in the Highlands? Lord Earlshope talked of her *protégée* as if she were merely some ordinary country girl who was

about to marry and become the mistress of a household ; whereas all the men she had heard talk of Coquette spoke of her as something rare and wonderful. Lady Drum was almost sorry that she had asked him to join them at the theatre that evening ; but she reflected that, if Lord Earlshope were so indifferent, the peaceful progress of the two cousins towards marriage was rendered all the more secure. She only thought that Coquette would have made a beautiful and charming hostess to preside over the hospitalities of Earlshope.

“Ho, ho !” said Lady Drum, when Coquette came down to dinner dressed for the theatre. “We hae made our toilette something just quite extraordinary. Mr. Thomas is a fortunate lad to hae so much done for him.”

“I do not dress for him, or for any one,” said Coquette, with an air of calm magnificence.

This going to the theatre was quite an excitement for Coquette, who had not visited any such place of amusement since she left France. Lady Drum warned her not to say anything about it in her letters to Airlie, or the chances were that the Minister would order her recall from Glasgow at once.

“And my cousin,” said Coquette, “has he never been to any theatre ?”

“That is more than I can say,” remarked Lady Drum, with a smile.

When at length they drove down to the big building, and went up the broad staircase, and got into the corridor, there was an odour of escaped gas and a confused sound of music which quite delighted Coquette—it was so like the odour and the sound prevalent in the theatres she had visited long ago in France. And when they got into the box, which was the biggest in the theatre, they found the Whaup already there, with two bouquets awaiting Lady Drum and Coquette. Lady Drum, naturally taking the place of honour, was perhaps a little glad to screen herself in her corner by the curtains ; but Coquette, with the calm air of a princess, and with her brilliant toilette getting a new splendour from the gleaming lights of the house, took her seat, and lifted her bouquet, and made the Whaup a pretty speech of thanks which filled his heart with pleasure ; then she turned her attention to the stage.

"Shall I ever be able," said the Whaup to himself, as he looked wistfully at her, "to give her pretty dresses like that, and buy her pearls for her neck and her hair, and take her to all the amusements?"

The young gentleman was rather proud; and would not even acknowledge to himself that Coquette could buy pearls for herself and pay for far more amusements than she cared to see.

The performances need not be described in detail. They consisted, in the first place, of a romantic drama of the good old kind, in which a lot of very pronounced characters—whose virtues and vices they took every opportunity of revealing to the audience—did impossible things in impossible places and talked a language unfamiliar to any nation at present inhabiting the earth. This piece was to be followed by a burlesque, for which Sir Peter professed himself to be impatient.

"For," said he, "there is in every burlesque a young lady with a saucy face and pretty ankles, with whom you can fall in love for an hour or two with impunity. And I am anxious for her appearance; because Miss Coquette has quite deserted me, and I am left out in the cold."

The truth is, Coquette had discovered in her cousin a quite astonishing familiarity with this theatre. He was acquainted with all its arrangements, and seemed to know the name of everybody in connection with it. Now, how had he gained this knowledge?

"Oh, I do see that the life of the students is not all study," Coquette remarked, with a gracious sarcasm; "you do sometimes find them singing 'Come lasses and lads,' and they do waste time with tobacco and laughing, and even know a good deal about the actresses of the theatre. Why was none of that in your letters to Airlie?"

"Well, I'll tell you the truth, Coquette," said the Whaup, with a laugh and a blush that became his handsome face well, "I dared not tell anybody at Airlie I went to the theatre; nor do I think I should have gone in any case but for a notion I had that, somehow or other, you must like the theatre. You never told me that, you know, but I guessed it from—from—from—"

"From my manner, or my talk? You do think me like an actress, then?"

"No, it is not that at all," said the Whaup. "You are too sincere and simple in your ways. But somehow I thought that, with your having been brought up in the south, and accustomed to a southern liking for enjoyment and artistic things, and with your sympathy for fine colours, and for music, and all that—why, I thought, Coquette, you would be sure to like the theatre; and so, do you know, I used to come here very often—not here, of course, but away up there to that dark gallery—and I used to sit and think what the theatre would be like when Coquette came to see it."

He spoke quite shyly; for, indeed, he half fancied she might laugh at those romantic dreamings of his when he was far away from her in the big city; but when he ventured to steal a glance at her face, lo! the soft dark eyes were quite moist. And she pretended to look down into the circle of flowers he had given her, and said in a low voice—

"You have been thinking of me very much when I was down in Airlie, and you here by yourself. I do not deserve it—but I will show my gratitude to you some day."

"Why, Coquette," he said, "you need not thank me for it. Only to think of you was a pleasure to me—the only pleasure I had all that long winter time."

Had Lady Drum heard the whispered little sentences which passed between these two young folks, she might, perhaps, have thought that they expressed more genuine emotion than the bursts of rhetoric in which, on the stage, the lucky lover was declaring his passion for the plump and middle-aged heroine. But they took care she should hear nothing of it.

Presently in came Lord Earlshope with his crush-hat under his arm; and he, also, had brought two bouquets. The Whaup noticed, with a passing twinge of mortification, that these were far finer and more delicate flowers than he had been able to buy, and he expected to see his own poor gifts immediately laid aside. But he did not know Coquette. She thanked Lord Earlshope very graciously for the flowers, and said how fortunate it was he had brought them.

"For I always do like to throw a bouquet to the actress' after her long evening's work, yet I was becoming sorry to give her the flowers that my cousin did bring me. But you have brought one for her, too, if I may give it to her?"

"Why, of course," said Earlshope, who probably did not put such value on a handful of flowers as did the Whaup: "and when you wish to give it her, let me pitch it on the stage, or you will probably hit one of the men in the orchestra."

"But you must keep them for the young lady of the burlesque," said Sir Peter; "she is always better-looking than the heroine of the drama, isn't she, isn't she? Then you have a greater opportunity of judging."

"Why?" said Lady Drum, with a look of such severity as effectually to prevent her husband answering—instead, he turned away and gaily hummed something about

*"Ecoutez la leçon
Qui vous fait Henriette."*

But there was another woman in the theatre who had attracted their attention before Lord Earlshope had arrived. She was seated in the corner of the box opposite; and, as a rule, was hidden behind the curtain. When they did get a glimpse of her, her manner and appearance were so singular as to attract a good deal of attention. She was of middle height, stout, with rather a florid face, coal-black hair, and a wild, uncertain look, which was seldom fixed on any object for two minutes together. Oddly enough, she stared over at Coquette in rather a peculiar way; until that young lady studiously kept her eyes on the stage, and did not again glance towards the opposite box.

"Singular-looking woman, isn't she?" said Sir Peter. "Opium, eh? eh? Is that opium that makes her eyes so wild? She drinks, I swear, and seems mad with drink, eh? eh? What do you say, Cassilis?"

"I wish you would not talk of that person," said Lady Drum; and then the conversation dropped.

About a quarter of an hour after Lord Earlshope had come into the theatre, this woman apparently retired from her corner behind the curtain; then she walked forward from the back of the box to the front of it; and there stood

at full length, looking over, with an odd expression of amusement on her face, at the group in front of Lady Drum's box. The movement was noticed by the whole theatre; and certainly it was noticed by Lord Earlshope; for, during one second, his eyes seemed to be fixed on this woman; and then, still regarding her, he retreated a step or two from the front of the box, with his face becoming deadly white.

"What is the matter?" said Lady Drum, anxiously—for he had been speaking to her—"you have become very pale—are you ill?"

"Lady Drum, I wish to speak with you privately for a moment," he said, quite calmly, but with a singular constraint of manner that somewhat alarmed her.

She rose at once, and followed him into the corridor outside. There he stood, apparently quite composed and yet still very pale.

"Would you mind taking Miss Cassilis home at once?" he said.

"Take her home! Why?"

"I cannot tell you why," he said, with some show of anxiety and impatience. "I cannot tell you why; but I wish, Lady Drum, you would. I beg you—I entreat you to take her away instantly!"

"But why?" said the old lady, who was at once perplexed and alarmed.

"You saw that woman opposite," said Lord Earlshope, rather abandoning the calmness of his demeanour. "She will come round here presently—I know she will—she will go into the box—she will insult Miss Cassilis: for Heaven's sake, Lady Drum, get her out of the way of that woman!"

"Bless me!" said Lady Drum, elevating her eyebrows, "are we a' to be frightened out o' our wits by a mad woman, and three men wi' us? And if there was no one wi' us," she added, drawing herself up, "I am not afraid of the girl being insulted if she is under my care; and what for should any woman, mad as she may be, fasten upon us? My certes! I will see that she does not come near the girl, or my name is not Margaret Ainslie!"

For a moment or two Lord Earlshope stood irresolute,

with mortification and dismay plainly evident on his pale features ; then he said, suddenly—

“ I must tell you at once, Lady Drum. I have many a time determined to do so—but put it off until now—when I can be silent no longer. That woman in the theatre just now, a woman soddened and mad with brandy—is my wife—at least, she was my wife some years ago. Goodness knows, I have no reason to be afraid of her but one—it is for the sake of Miss Cassilis I beg of you, Lady Drum—to take her away—out of her reach—she is a woman of outrageous passions—a scene in a public place will have all the excitement of a new sort of drunkenness for her——”

To all these incoherent ejaculations, Lady Drum only replied—

“ Your wife ! ”

“ This is not a time to blame me for anything,” he said, hurriedly. “ I cannot give you any explanations just now. You don’t know why I should have concealed my marriage with this horrible woman—but you will not blame me when you hear. All I want is to secure Miss Cassilis’ safety.”

“ That,” said Lady Drum, with firmness, “ is secure enough in my keeping. You need not be afraid, Lord Earlshope—she is quite secure where she is.”

“ You mean to keep her in the theatre ? ”

“ Most certainly.”

“ Then I will go. If I leave, that woman’s mood may change ; but I see from her laughing to herself that she means mischief. I cannot charge my own wife at the police-court.”

He left the theatre there and then. Lady Drum returned to the box, and made some sort of apology for his departure. But she did not see much of what was going on upon the stage ; for her thoughts were busy with many strange things that she now recollected as having been connected with Lord Earlshope ; and sometimes she turned from Coquette’s face to glance at the box opposite. Coquette was thoroughly enjoying the piece ; the woman in the opposite box remained hidden, and was apparently alone.

CHAPTER XLIII.

COQUETTE IS TOLD.

LADY DRUM began to grow afraid. Should she send Coquette at once back to Airlie? Her first impulse, on hearing the disclosures made by Lord Earlshope at the theatre, was one of indignation and anger against himself, for having, as she thought, unnecessarily acted a lie during so many years, and deceived his friends. She now understood all the strange references he had often made to married life—the half-concealed and bitter irony of his talk—his nervous susceptibility on certain points—his frequent appearance of weariness and hopelessness, as of a man to whom life was no longer of any value. She was amazed at the morbid sense of shame which rendered this man so anxious to avoid the confession of his having made a desperate blunder in his youth. Why had he gone about under false colours? Why had he imposed on his friends? Why had he spoken to Coquette?

This thought of Coquette flashed upon Lady Drum as a revelation. She knew now why the disclosure of Earlshope's marriage had made her angry; and she at once did him the justice of remembering that, so far as she knew, he had made no pretensions to be the lover of Coquette. That had been Lady Drum's secret hope: he could not be blamed for it.

But at the same time there was something about the relations between Earlshope and Coquette which she did not understand; and as she felt herself peculiarly responsible for that young lady, she began to ask herself if she had not better make all things safe by sending Coquette home to her uncle. Lady Drum sat in the corner of her morning-room, and looked down from the window on the Park. Coquette was out there as usual—for there was sunshine abroad, which she loved as a drunkard loves drink—and she was leisurely reading a book under the shadow of her sunshade. How quiet and happy she looked—buried away from all consciousness of the world around her in that other world

of romance that lay unfolded on her knee ! Lady Drum had got to love the girl with a mother's tenderness ; and as she now looked down on her she wondered what precautions could be taken to render the fair young life inviolate from wrong and suffering, if that were possible.

First of all, she wrote a note to Lord Earlshope, and sent it down to his hotel, asking him to call on her immediately. She wished to have further explanations before saying anything to Sir Peter, or, indeed, to any one of the little circle that had been formed at Airlie. At the moment she was writing this letter, Earlshope himself was walking quickly up to the place where Coquette sat.

"Ah, it is you ! I do wish much to see you for a few moments," she said, with something of gladness in her face.

He did not reply ; but sat down beside her, his lips firm, and his brow clouded. She did not notice this alteration from his ordinary demeanour ; but immediately proceeded to say, in rather a low voice, and with her eyes grown serious and even anxious—

"I have much to say to you. I have been thinking over all our position with each other, and I am going to ask you for a favour. First of all, I will tell you a secret."

Why did she look constrained, and even agitated ? he asked himself. Had she already heard from Lady Drum ? Her fingers were working nervously with the book before her ; her breath seemed to go and come more quickly ; and her voice was almost inaudible.

"This is what I must tell you," she said, with her eyes fixed on the ground. "I have promised to my cousin to be his wife. I did tell you I should do that, and now it is done, and he is glad. I am not glad, perhaps—not now—but afterwards it may be different. And so, as I am to be his wife, I do not think it is right I should see you any more ; and I will ask you to go away now altogether, and when we do meet, here or in Airlie, it will be the same with us as strangers. You will do this for my sake—will you not ? It is much to ask ; I shall be more sorry than you, perhaps ; but how can I see you if I am to marry him ?"

"And so we are to be strangers, Coquette," he said, quite

calmly. "It is all over, then. We have had some pleasant dreaming ; but the daylight has come, and the work of the world. When we meet each other, as you say, it will be as strangers—strangers as on the first morning I saw you at Airlie, driving up the road in the sunlight, when I was glad to know that you were going to remain at the Manse. All that happened down at Airlie is to be forgotten ; and you and I are just like two people passing each other in the street, and not expecting, perhaps, even to meet again. Yet there are some things which neither you nor I shall ever forget."

"Ah, I know that—I know that !" said Coquette, almost wildly. "Do not speak of all that now. Sometimes I do think I cannot do as my cousin wishes—I become afraid—I cannot speak to him—I begin to tremble when I think of all the long years to come. Alas ! I have sometimes wondered whether I shall live till then."

"Coquette, what do you mean ?" he said. "Have you resolved to make your life miserable ? Is this how you look forward to marriage, which ought to be the proudest event in a woman's life, and the seal of all the happiness to come after ? What have you done, Coquette ?"

"I have done what I ought to do," she said, "and it is only at moments that I do fear of it. My cousin is very good ; he is very fond of me ; he will break his heart if I do not marry him. And I do like him very well, too. Perhaps, in some years, I shall have forgotten a great deal of all that is past now, and shall have come to be very fond of him, too ; and it will be a pleasure to me to become his wife. You must not be sorry for me. You must not think it is a sacrifice, or anything like that. When I am afraid now—when I am sad too, so that I wish I could go away to France, and not see any more of this country—it is only when I do think of Airlie, and of—of—"

She never finished the sentence, because her lips were beginning to quiver. And for a moment, too, his look had grown absent, as if he were calling up memories of the days of their meetings on the moor—meetings which were but recent, and yet which now seemed buried far away in the forlorn mists of the past. All at once he appeared to rouse himself, and said, with some abruptness—

“Coquette, you do not blame me for being unable to help you in your distress. I am going to tell you why I cannot. I am going to tell you what will render it unnecessary for me to promise not to see you again; for you will hate the sight of me, and consider me not fit to be spoken to by any honest man or woman. Many and many a time have I determined to tell you; and yet it seemed so hard that I should make you my enemy—that you should go away only with contempt for me——”

She interrupted him quickly, and with some alarm on her face.

“Ah, I know,” she said. “You will tell me something you have done—why? What is the use of that now? I do not wish to hear it. I wish to think of you always as I think now; and when I look back at our last meeting in Glasgow—you sitting there, I here, and bidding good-bye to all that time which began down at Airlie, I shall have pleasure of it, even if I cry about it. Why do you tell me this thing? What is the use? Is it wise to do it? I have seen you often about to tell me a secret. I have seen you disturbed and anxious; and sometimes I have wondered, too, and wished to know. But then, I did think there was enough trouble in the world without adding this; and I hoped you would remain to me always as you were then—when I did first begin to know you.”

“Why, Coquette,” he said, with a strange, half-tender look of admiration, “your generosity shames me all the more, and shows me what a horribly selfish wretch I have been. You don’t half seem to know how good you are.”

His voice dropped a little here, as there was some one coming along the road. Lord Earlshope and Coquette both sat silent, and did not look up, expecting the stranger to pass.

But the stranger did not pass. On the contrary, she came nearer, as if to sit down on the same seat with them, and so Earlshope turned round to see who she was. No sooner had he done so than he started to his feet with an oath, and confronted the woman who stood before him. Coquette, alarmed beyond measure, saw that the stranger was the singular-looking person, with the coarse and red face, and the unsteady black eyes, who had sat opposite her

in the theatre the previous evening, and who now regarded both herself and Lord Earlshope with a glance full of malicious amusement in it. He, on the other hand, had his face white with rage, and indeed, had advanced a step or two as if to thrust her back from Coquette; but now he stood with apparent self-control, his hands clenched.

"You had better go home," he said, still facing the stranger. "I give you fair warning you had better go home."

"Why," said the woman, with a loud laugh, "you have not said as much to me for six years back! You might give me a pleasanter welcome. My dear," she added, looking to Coquette, "I am sorry to have disturbed you; but do you know who I am? I am Lady Earlshope. You are not surprised? Perhaps you don't understand? Indeed, I saw you were a foreigner by your dress last evening. The women in this country don't know how to dress; do they? What are you—Italian or French?"

Coquette had risen to her feet, and stood quite still—a trifle pale, perhaps, but not visibly terrified. The woman advanced a step or two; Lord Earlshope caught her by the wrist. Her air of bantering merriment changed in a moment, and a glow of passion sprang to the hot, powerful-looking face, and the sullen black eyes. She wrenched away her hand with an angry vehemence, and let loose all the venom of her tongue.

"Have you no shame, woman, that you make an exhibition of yourself in the open day?" he said. "Are you determined to give me the honour of appearing in a police-court against you?"

With that she burst out into another laugh, the harshness and unreality of which sounded strangely in Coquette's ears.

"It is not the first time I have been in a police-court. Did you hear of my horse-whipping that old Duke in the streets of Madrid? Yes, I thought you must have heard the story. Come, Harry, let's be friends! I will leave you with the little Italian. I have my carriage at the gate there—there is brandy in it—shall we celebrate the charming conjugal scene we have just gone through? No!"

She shrugged her shoulders, and laughed in a vacuous way; it was apparent she required no more brandy.

“Good-bye, then, for the present. This little conversation with you, Harry, has been quite delightful—reminding one of old days—but don’t you lay hands on me again, or, by heavens, you will be a dead man the next moment. *Addio, addio!* And for you, you pretty little signorina, with the black eyes and the dumb mouth, *quando avrò il piacere di rivederla?* What, you don’t speak Italian either? Never mind. I shall see both of you again, I hope.”

She walked back along the road to the gate of the park, where an open carriage was waiting. A servant opened the door for her. She stepped up and took her seat, and drove off alone, laughing and kissing her hands in a tipsy fashion to the pair she had just left.

“Coquette,” said Earlshope, “that is my wife.”

He was watching every line of her face, with an anxious sadness, to gather what her first impulse would be. And yet he felt that in uttering these words he had for ever disgraced himself in her eyes, and deserved only to be thrust away from her with horror and shame. Indeed he waited to hear her own lips pronounce his condemnation and decree his banishment.

Coquette came a step nearer and looked him in the face, and held out her hand, and said—

“I know it all now, and am very sorry for you.”

“But don’t you remember what I have done, Coquette?” he said, with wonder in his look. “I am not fit to take your hand. But if you would only listen to me for a moment—that is all I ask. Will you sit down, Coquette? I cannot excuse myself, but I want to tell you something.”

“You have had a sad life,” said Coquette, calmly. “I do now know the reason of many things, and I cannot be angry. It is no use to be angry now, when we are going away from each other.”

“You see that woman,” he said, sinking down on the seat with an expression of the most utter and hopeless despair. “I married her when I was a lad fresh from college. I met her in Paris—I was travelling—she, too, was going about with her father, who called himself an officer; I followed her from town to town; and in three months I was married. Married!—chained to a wild beast rather. When I got to

know the hideous habits of the woman to whom I was indissolubly linked, suicide was my first thought. What other refuge had I from a state of things that was worse than anything death could bring to me? The law cannot step in between her and me. Brutal and debased as she is, she has far too good a notion of the advantages of a tolerable income to risk it by doing anything on which I could claim a divorce. Ignorant and passionate she is; but she is not a fool in money matters; and so there was nothing for it but to buy up her absence by paying any price for it. I discovered what sort of woman she was before we ever returned to England; and when I came back here, I came alone. I dreaded the exposure of the blunder I had committed, partly on my own account, but chiefly on account of the disgrace I had brought on my family. How could I introduce this drunken and insolent woman to my friends, and have them insulted by her open defiances of decency? Year after year I lived down there at Earlshope—hearing only of her wild escapades from a distance. I exacted from her, as a condition of giving her more than the half of my income, a promise to drop my name; and perhaps you may have heard of the notorious Mrs. Smith Arnold, with whom the London magistrates are familiar. That is the woman you have just seen. These stories came to me down at Earlshope, until I dared scarcely open a newspaper; and I grew to hate the very sight of woman, as being related to the devil who had ruined my life. And then you came to Airlie.”

He paused for a moment. She had never before seen him so moved.

“I looked in your pure and young face, and I thought the world seemed to grow more wholesome and sweet. I began to believe that there were tender and true-hearted women in the world; and sometimes I thought what I might have been, too, but for that irremediable blunder. Fancy some sinner in hell, who is tortured by remorse over the sins and lost opportunities of his life, and there comes to him a bunch of pale violets, sweet with the fragrant memories of his youth, when the world was innocent and fair to him, and when he believed in the girl who was walking with him, and in the heaven over his head——”

"Ah, do not talk like that!" she said. "It is more terrible than all you have told me."

"You do not know the condition into which I had sunk. To you I was a mere easy-tempered idler, who strolled about the country and amused himself indolently. To myself I was a sepulchre, filled with the dead bones and dust of buried hopes and beliefs. What had I to live for? When I went about and saw other men enjoying the comfort of happy domestic relations—men who had a home, and a constant companion and confidante to share their holiday journeys or their quiet summer evenings—my own solitude and wretchedness were all the more forcibly thrust on me. I shut myself up in that house at Airlie. It was enough if the hours went by—enough that I was left alone. Goodness knows, I did not complain much or seek to revenge myself on society for my own mistake. If my blunder, according to the existing state of the law, demanded so much punishment, I was willing to suffer it. During these solitary days, I used to study myself as if there were another being beside me, and watch how the last remnants of belief in anything were being gradually worn away, bit by bit, by the irritation of this sense of wrong. If you had known me as I really was when you first saw me, you would have shrunk away in fear. Do you remember the morning I got up on the dog-cart to talk to you?"

"Yes," said Coquette, in a low voice.

"For a few moments I forgot myself. When I left you at the Manse, I discovered to my intense astonishment that I was quite cheerful—that the world seemed ever so much brighter, and that Airlie moor looked well in the sunlight. Then I thought of your coming in among those gloomy Cameronians, and whether your light and happy southern nature, which I saw even then, would conquer the prejudice and suspicion around you. It was a problem that interested me deeply. When I got to know you a little you used to tell me inadvertently, how things were going on at the Manse, and I saw that the fight would be a hard one, but that you would win in the end. First of all, you took your cousin captive—that was natural. Then the Minister. Then you won over Leezibeth. There remains only Andrew now; for I think you would secure a large majority in a *plébiscite* of the

villagers. As for myself, that I can scarcely talk about just yet. It seemed so harmless a thing at first for me to see you—to have the comfort even of looking at you from a distance as you sat in the little church—or to pass you on the road, with a look and a smile. There was a new life in Airlie. Sometimes I thought bitterly of what might have been but for the error which had ruined me; but that thought disappeared in the actual enjoyment of your presence. Then I began to play with the danger that would have been more obvious to another man, but which I laughed at. For was it possible that I could fall in love, like a schoolboy, and sigh and write verses? I began to make experiments with myself. You know the rest, Coquette; but you do not know the remorse that struck me when I found that my thoughtlessness had prepared a great misery for you."

"It was no misery," she said, simply; "it was a pleasure to me; and if it was wrong, which I do not know, it comes to an end now. And you—I am not angry with you; for your life has not been a happy one—and you did not know until we were up in the Highlands that it mattered to me—and then you went away——"

"Coquette," he said, "I won't have you make excuses for me. I can make none for myself. When I look at you, and think of what I ought to have done when you came to Airlie—I should have told you there and then, and guarded against every possibility—I feel that I am an outcast. But who would have thought it possible?" he added, with his eyes grown distant and sombre. "I do not know how it has all come about; but you and I are sitting together here for the last time; and we are going different ways—whither, who can tell?"

With that Coquette rose—no trace of emotion visible on the calm face.

"Good-bye," she said. "I will hear of you sometimes through Lady Drum."

"Good-bye, Coquette," he said, taking her hand. And then a strange expression came over his face, and he added suddenly, "It is madness and wickedness to say it, but I will say it. Coquette, you will never forget that there is a man in the world who loves you better than his own life—who will venture everything that remains to him in this

world and the next to do you the tiniest service. Will you remember that—always? Good-bye, Coquette—God bless you for your gentleness, and your sweetness, and your forgiveness!”

She turned from him, and walked away, and went up the steps towards the house, all by herself. As she passed through the hall, Lady Drum met her, and asked her a question. The girl replied, quite calmly, though rather in a low voice, and passed on. Lady Drum was struck with the expression of her face, which was singularly colourless and immobile; and she looked after her as she went up the stairs. Was there not something unsteady in her gait? The old lady followed her, and went to the door of her room, and listened. A great fear smote her heart, for within there was a sound of wild weeping and sobbing; and when she straightway opened the door, and hurried into the room, she found Coquette sitting by the bedside, her face and hands buried in the clothes, and her slight frame trembling and convulsed with the passion of her grief.

“What is it, Coquette? What is it, Coquette?” she cried, in great alarm.

And she sat down by the girl, and drew her towards her bosom, as she would have done with her own child, and hid her face there. And then Coquette told her story.

CHAPTER XLIV.

COQUETTE'S FOREBODINGS.

SIR PETER was standing at the window, aimlessly whistling, when his wife came in so hurriedly that he at once turned to see what was the matter. Indeed, she advanced upon him with such an air that he rather drew back, and certainly stopped his whistling.

“Are you a man?” she said, with wrath in her voice.

“I hope so,” said Sir Peter, innocently.

“Then you know what you have to do. You have to go at once to Lord Earlshope—I have scarcely the patience to name him—and tell him what every honest man and

woman thinks of him—what it is he deserves for conduct unworthy of an African savage——”

“Good heavens !” cried Sir Peter, “Do you want me to commit murder, or what ? I am not Macbeth, and I won’t be goaded into murdering anybody——”

It was Coquette who interposed. She had followed into the room immediately after Lady Drum, and she now came up.

“It is all a mistake, Sir Peter,” she said, with perfect self-command. “I did tell Lady Drum something—she did not wait to hear it all. Lord Earlshope has done nothing to be blamed—it is a misapprehension—a mistake.”

“Why, Lord Earlshope is a married man !” said Lady Drum, hotly.

“That may be a crime, my dear,” said Sir Peter, mildly ; “but it is one that brings with it its own punishment.”

“Lady Drum,” said Coquette, in an imploring voice, “I do wish you to come away. I will explain it all to you. Indeed, have I not the right to say you shall not tell any one what I have told you ?”

“Certainly,” said Sir Peter. “Who wants to betray a young lady’s secrets ? Take her away, my dear child, and pacify her : I am afraid to meddle with her.”

Lady Drum stood irresolute. On the one side was the beseeching of Coquette, on the other was the feather-brained husband, who apparently would not interest himself in anything but his lunch and his dinner. Yet the brave old Scotchwoman had a glow of indignation burning in her cheeks, over the wrong which she deemed to have been committed towards the girl intrusted to her charge. Coquette put her hand on her arm, and gently led her away from the room.

“That’s right,” said Sir Peter to them, as he turned to his drumming on the window-panes, “keep your secrets to yourselves—they are dangerous property to lend. I don’t want to hear any mysteries. I am for an easy life.”

But Lady Drum was in no such careless mood ; and very piteously Coquette had to beg of her not to make an exposure of the matter. Indeed, the girl besought her so earnestly that Lady Drum was driven into warm language to defend herself, and at last she used the word

"infamous." Then Coquette rose up, quite pale and proud, and said—

"I am sorry you think that, Lady Drum. Why? Because I must go from your house. If he is infamous, I am infamous too, for I do not think he has done any wrong."

"Not done wrong!" cried the old lady. "Not done wrong! A married man who trifles wi' the affections of a young girl!"

"He did not do so," said Coquette, calmly. "It was a misfortune that happened to us both—that is all. You do not know the pain and misery it has caused him; nor his other troubles; nor how we had determined not to see each other again. Ah, you do not understand it at all, if you think he is to blame. He is very miserable, that is what I know—that is enough for me to know; and if he has done wrong, I have too; and yet, Lady Drum, if my mamma were here, I would go down on my knees before her, and I would tell her all about it from the first day at Airlie, and I do know she would not be angry with me for what I have done——"

Coquette turned away her head. Lady Drum went to her and drew her nearer to her, and hid her head in her arms.

"You are very unfortunate, my poor girl—for you are fond of him yet, are you not?"

"Oh, Lady Drum!" she cried wildly, bursting into tears, "I do love him better than everything in the world—and I cannot help it—and now he is gone, I shall never see him again, neither here nor at Airlie, for he will not go back to Airlie—and all I wish now is that I might be dead, and not wake up morning after morning to think of him far away——"

"Hush, child!" said the old woman, gravely. "You do not know what these wild words mean. You must teach yourself not to think of him. It is a sin to think of him."

"But if I cannot help it," sobbed the girl; "if it always comes back to me—all that happened at Airlie—and when we were sailing in the summer time—how can I help thinking of him, Lady Drum? It is hard enough if I do not see him—and I would like to see him only once, to say that I am sorry for him—and that, whatever people may

say, I know, and I will remember, that he was a good man—and very gentle to me—and very kind to all people, as you know, Lady Drum——”

“You must think less of him, and more of yourself, my girl,” said the old lady, kissing her tenderly. “It is a misfortune that has fallen ower ye, as you say ; but you are young yet, with plenty o’ life and spirits in ye, and ye must determine to cure yourself o’ an infatuation which is dangerous beyond speaking or thinking. Coquette, what for do ye look like that ? Are ye in a trance ? Bestir yourself, my lassie—listen, listen, there is your cousin come, and he is talking to Sir Peter in the hall.”

“My cousin ? ”

“Yes.”

Coquette shuddered, and turned away her head.

“I cannot see him. Tell him, Lady Drum, I go back to Airlie to-morrow ; and I will see him when he comes in the autumn—perhaps.”

“Why do you say ‘perhaps’ like that, Coquette ? ”

“The autumn is a long way off, is it not ? Perhaps he will not be able to see me ; but I shall be at Airlie then ; and perhaps I shall know that he has come into the churchyard to look for me.”

CHAPTER XLV.

A LEGEND OF EARLSHOPE.

It was a wild night at Airlie. The sea could be heard breaking with tremendous force all along the shore ; and the wind that blew about the moor brought with it occasional heavy showers of rain. Occasionally, too, there were rifts in the clouds ; and a white gleam of moonlight would shine out and down on the dark landscape. The villagers kept themselves snug and warm indoors ; and were thankful they were not out at sea on such a night.

Earlshope was more sheltered ; but if the house itself was not much shaken by the storm, its inmates could hear the moaning of the wind through the trees in the park, and the howling of the gusts that tore through the fir-woods beyond the moor. The male servants had gone away

on some errand or another to Greenock; and as the women-folk did not like to be left quite alone, the Pensioner had consented to come up from Airlie and sleep in the house that night. But first of all, of course, there was a general supper in the housekeeper's room; and then the Pensioner and the housekeeper and the two girls began to tell stories of old things that had happened in the neighbourhood. By-and-by that duty almost entirely devolved upon the Pensioner, who was known to be skilled in legends; and as he had also brought with him his fiddle, he set himself down generally to entertain the company, fortifying himself from time to time with a tumbler of whisky-toddy, which the housekeeper carefully replenished.

Somehow or other, as the night wore on, his stories and his music assumed a more and more uncanny and mystic tinge. Perhaps the howling of the wind in the chimneys, or the more distant sound of its wailing through the big trees in the park, lent an air of melancholy to the old ballads and legends he recited; but, at all events, the small circle of listeners grew almost silent, and sat as if spell-bound. He no longer played "There grows a bonnie brier bush in our kailyard," but sang to them, in a quavering and yet plaintive voice, the story of Ellen of Strathcoe, who was rowed away over the lake when the moon was shining and the breeze blowing lightly, but who never reached the shore. And then the old man came nearer to his own time, and told them of the awful stories of second-sight that he had heard when a boy, over among the Cowal hills—of warnings coming at the dead of the night—of voices heard in churchyards—of visions seen by persons in their own houses, as they sat alone in the evening. The girls listened partly to him, and partly to the wind without. The great house seemed to be even more empty than usual; and the creaking of a door or the shaking of a window could be heard in distant rooms. Earlshope was a lonely place at that time of night—so far away from all houses, and so near to the wild moor.

"But there is no story about Earlshope," said one of the girls.

She spoke in a quite timid voice; as if she were listening to the sounds without.

“Wass you never told, then, o’ sa auld man that lived here by himsel’, and would ride about sa country at night, and drink by himsel’ in such a faishion as no man leevin’ would pelieve?”

They did not answer him : they only looked—their eyes grown apprehensive.

“It wass an auld Lord Earlshope, as I hef peen told, and he wass a wild man for sa drink ; and no one in all sa country side would go near him. Sa bairns would flee from him as he came riding down sa road, and he would ride at them, and frichten them, and gallop on wi’ shrieks o’ laughin’, just as if he wass sa teffle himsel’. And he would ride about sa country at nicht, and knock at folk’s doors or windows wi’ his stick, and cry in till them, and then ride on again, wi’ fearfu’ laughin’ and singin’, just as if he wass possessed. And sare wass a girl in Airlie—a bonnie young lass she wass, as I hef peen told, and he did sweer on a Bible wis sa most dreadfu’ sweerin’, he would carry her some nicht to Earlshope, or else set sa house on fire over herself and her folk. And sa lass—she was so frichtened she would never go outside sa house ; and it wass said she wass to go to Greenock or to Glasgow into service—if sare wass service then, for it wass a long time ago.”

The Pensioner here bethought him of his toddy, and turned to his glass. During that brief pause there was a dead silence—only some laurel bushes rustled outside in the wind. The Pensioner cleared his throat and resumed his tale.

“And Lord Earlshope, as I hef peen told, did hear sat she would go away from Airlie, and he was in a great rage, and swore sat he would burn sa whole place down, and her too, and all her folk. But one day it wass known to him sat her parents would be over in Saltcoats ; and he had men sare, and sa men got hold of sa lassie’s folk, and clapped them into a big boat, and took sem out to sea. And sa young lass waited all sa afternoon, and say did not come home ; nor yet at nicht, and she was all by herself, for she wass afraid to go out and speer at sa neighbours. And then, as I hef peen told, he went to sa house at sa dead o’ nicht, and pulled sa lassie out, and took her on sa horse, and rode over wi’ her to Earlshope—her screamin’, him laughin’ and sweerin’, as wass his ordinar’. And so wild wass he wis sa

drink, sat he ordered all sa servants out o' sa house, and sey listened frae the outside to sa awful noises in sa rooms—him ragin' and sweerin', and laughin', jist like sa teffle. And then, as I hef peen told, a licht was seen—and it grew—and it grew—and flames wass in all sa windows—and sare was a roarin', and a noise, and a burnin'—and when the mornin' wass come, Earlshope wass burned down to sa ground, and nothing could be seen o' sa young lass or sa auld man either."

The Pensioner took another pull at the tumbler. It was getting more and more late.

"And this, as I hef peen told, is a new Earlshope; but sa auld man hass never gone away from sa place. He is still about here in sa night-time. I do not know he hass been seen; but many's and many's sa time he wass heard to laugh in among the trees in the park, and you will hear sometimes the sound of sa horse's feet not far from sa house. Trop, trop!—trop, trop!—sat is it—licht, licht—and you will not know whesser it is close by, or far away, only you will hear sa laughin' close by, as if it wass at your ear."

Suddenly at this moment a string of the Pensioner's fiddle snapped with a loud bang, and there was a simultaneous shriek from the women. In the strange pause that followed, when they all listened with a beating heart, it seemed to them that at some distance outside there was a measured beat on the soft earth, exactly like the sound of a horse riding up to Earlshope. A minute or two more and the suspicion became a certainty.

"Listen!" said one of the girls, instinctively seizing hold of her neighbour's arm. The wind was still moaning through the trees, but none the less the footfalls of the horse became more and more distinct, and were obviously drawing near to the house.

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed the housekeeper, with a scared face. "Wha can it be at this time o' nicht?"

"It is coming nearer," said another.

"Jeannie!" cried the third, in a frenzy of desperation, "dinna haud me by the airm—a body canna listen!"

The measured sounds grew nearer, until they ceased, apparently, at the very door. Then there was the sharp clink of the bell-handle on the stone, and far away in a

hollow corridor a bell jangled hideously. The housekeeper uttered a cry and started to her feet.

"Gude forgi'e me, but there's no a Bible near at hand!" she exclaimed in an agony of trepidation. "Mr. Lamont, Mr. Lamont, what is to be done? This is fearfu'—this is awfu'! Jeannie, what for do ye no open the door?"

"Open the door?" said the girl, faintly, with her eyes starting out of her head.

"Ay, open the door!" said the housekeeper savagely. "Isn't it your business?"

"But—but—but—" stammered the girl, with her teeth chattering, "n—no to open the door to the deevil!"

"I will open sa door!" said the Pensioner, calmly.

When he rose and went into the dark hall the women followed close at his heels, all clinging to each other. Another vigorous pull at the bell had nearly brought them to their knees; but Neil Lamont, groping his way to the door, began to fumble about for the bolts, using much florid and unnecessary Gaelic all the while. At last the bolts were withdrawn, and the door opened. On the threshold stood the dusky figure of a man; beyond him the horse from which he had dismounted, and which he held by the bridle. The women shrank back in affright—one of them uttering a piercing scream. The Pensioner stood for a moment irresolute, and then he advanced a step, and said, with a fine assumption of courage—

"Who sa teffle are you, and what for you will come to disturb a quiet house? What is it sat you want?"

"Confound you, send somebody to take my horse!" was the sharp reply he met with from the mysterious stranger. "What's the matter? Is there no one about the place but a pack of frightened women?"

"It is his lordship himsel'!" cried Neil. "Eh, wha did expect to see you sa nicht?"

"Come and take my horse, you fool!"

"Sat I will; but it is no use calling names," answered Neil, while the women began to breathe.

The Pensioner got the keys of the stable, and led off the horse, while Lord Earlishope entered the hall, called for lights, and began to rub the rain out of his eyes and hair. The whole house was presently in a scurry to have his

lordship's wants attended to; but there was considerable delay, for none of the women would go singly on the shortest errand. When, after some time, Neil returned from feeding and grooming the horse in a rough-and-ready fashion, he infused some little courage into the household; and at length the turmoil caused by the unexpected arrival subsided somewhat. Finally, Lord Earlshope called the housekeeper into his study and said to her—

"I shall leave early to-morrow morning. There have been no visitors at Earlshope recently?"

"No, your lordship."

"It is very likely that a woman—a Mrs. Smith Arnold she calls herself—will come here to-morrow and ask to be shown over the place. You will on no account allow her to come into the house,—you understand?"

"But wha can come here the morn?" said the housekeeper; "it's the Sabbath."

"This person may drive here. In any case, you will allow no stranger to come into the place."

"I wish the men folk were coming back afore Monday," said the housekeeper, who was still a trifle perturbed by the Pensioner's stories.

"Cannot three of you keep one woman from coming into the house? You can lock the doors—you need not even talk to her."

Having received her instructions, the housekeeper left; and Lord Earlshope went to a writing-desk, and addressed an envelope to a firm of solicitors in London. The words he then hurriedly wrote and enclosed in the envelope were merely these—"Withhold payment to Mrs. Smith Arnold, if demanded. The stipulations have not been observed. I will call on you in a few days.—Earlshope."

It was close on midnight when he entered the house; and shortly after daybreak next morning he had again set out, telling no one of his intentions. The servants, accustomed to his abrupt comings and goings, were not surprised; but none of them forgot the manner in which Lord Earlshope had ridden up at midnight in the fashion of his notorious ancestor. As for the housekeeper, she was more consequential than ever, having been intrusted with a secret.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE MINISTER'S PUBLISHER.

ON the morning of the day on which Lord Earlshope paid this sudden visit to Airlie, the Minister came down into the parlour of the Manse, where Leezibeth was placing the breakfast things.

"Miss Cassilis is coming home to-day," he said.

"Atweel, I'm glad to hear't," said Leezibeth, uttering that peculiar sigh of resignation with which most elderly Scotchwomen receive good news.

The boys were all rejoiced to hear that Coquette was coming; for they had not forgotten the presents she had promised them; and they knew from of old that she was as little likely to forget. This being Saturday, and a wet Saturday, too, they unanimously resolved to stay at home, and play at "bools" in the lobby until Coquette should arrive from Glasgow. But the restraint of this form of amusement became insufferable. Leezibeth's remonstrances about their noise—the Minister being then engaged with his sermon—at last drove them out of the house and up into the hay-loft, where they had unlimited freedom of action and voice.

When Leezibeth delivered to Andrew the necessary orders about the dog-cart it was in a somewhat defiant way—she knew he would not regard very favourably the return of the young lady. But Andrew kept most of his grumbling to himself; and Leezibeth only overheard the single word "Jezebel!"

"Jezebel!" she cried, in a sudden flame of anger. "Wha is Jezebel? Better Jezebel than Shimei the Benjamite, that will be kenned for ever by his ill-temper and his ill-tongue."

Leezibeth stood there, as if daring him to say another word. Andrew was a prudent man. He began to tie his shoe, and as he stooped he only muttered—

"H'm! If Shimei had had a woman's tongue, David nicht hae suffered waur. And it's an ill time come to us

if we are a' to bend the knee to this foreign woman, that can scarcely be spoken o' without offence. Better for us a' if the Minister's brither had been even like Coniah, the son of Jehoiakim. As it was said o' him, 'I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country, where ye were not born, and there shall ye die. But to the land whereunto they desire to return, thither shall they not return.'"

"Od, I wish Maister Tammas could hear ye!" said Leezibeth, in desperation at being out-talked.

"Ay, ay, Maister Tammas; it was an ill day for him that she came to the Manse. Mark my words, the Minister 'll repent him o't when he sees his auldest son a wreck and a ruin, and a by-word i' the country-side. Ay, indeed: when the young man turns away from his ain folk, Leezibeth, to marry ane o' the daughters o' Heth."

"What for no?" cried Leezibeth, boldly. "Where could he wale out a bonnier lass? I wish ye'd stop yer yaumering, and look oot some plaids and rugs for the dog-cairt, for there's wind and rain enough to last us for the rest o' the year."

A very surly man was Andrew Bogue when he set out at mid-day to drive over to the station. He was enveloped so that only the tip of his nose could be seen; for the wind was dashing heavy showers over the moor, and the sea was white with the breaking of the great waves. It was not a day to improve a man's temper; and when, at last, Coquette arrived, Andrew was not the most pleasant person to bid her welcome.

Coquette was alone. Sir Peter was for accompanying her on the brief railway journey; but she would not hear of it, as she knew that the dog-cart would await her arrival. Coquette came out into the little station. She asked Andrew to get her luggage; and while he was gone she turned and looked up to the high country beyond which Airlie lay. How dismal it looked! The wind was moving heavy masses of dull grey cloud across the sky; and between her and the gloomy landscape hovered the mist of the rain, underneath which the trees drooped, and the roads ran red. She had no view of the sea; but the plain of tumbling waves would not have brightened the

prospect much. And so at last she took her seat on the dog-cart ; and hid herself in thick shawls and rugs ; and was driven away through the dripping and desolate country. It was so different from her first coming hither !

"They are all well at Airlie ?" she said.

"Weel aneuch," said Andrew ; and that was all the conversation which passed between them on the journey.

They drew near Earlshope, and Coquette saw the entrance to the park, and the great trees hanging wearily in the rain. There was the strip of fir-wood, too, near which she had parted with Lord Earlshope but a short time ago, on that pleasant summer morning. The place looked familiar, and yet unfamiliar. The firs were almost black under the heavy sky ; and there was no living creature abroad to temper the loneliness of the moor which stretched beyond. It seemed to Coquette that she was now coming back to a prison, in which she must spend the rest of her life. Hitherto all had been uncertainty as to her future, and she had surrendered herself to the new and sweet experiences of the moment with scarcely a thought. But now all the past had been shut up as if it were a sealed book, and there remained to her—what ? Coquette began to think that she had seen the best of life ; and that she would soon feel old.

She went into the Manse. It did not look a cheerful place just then. Outside, damp and cold ; inside, the wind had blown the smoke down one of the chimneys, and the atmosphere of the house was a dull blue. But Leezibeth came running to meet her ; and overwhelmed her with fussy kindness about her wet garments ; and hurried her upstairs ; and provided her with warm slippers, and what not ; until Coquette—who had abandoned herself into her hands—became aware that she was ungratefully silent about those little attentions.

"You are very kind to me, Leesiebess," she said.

"'Deed no, I'm fair delighted to see ye back, miss," said Leezibeth, "for the Manse has been like a kirkyaird since the day ye left it. The Minister has been shut up in the study from mornin' till nicht ; the laddies at the schule ; and that cantankerous auld Andrew grumbling until a body's life was like to be worried out. And I'm thinking Glasgow

doesna agree wi' ye, miss. Ye are looking a wee bit worn and pale ; but running about the moor will soon set ye up again."

"It is not pleasant to go on the moor now," said Coquette, as she looked out of the window on the dreary prospect.

"But it canna be aye rainin'—though it seems to try sometimes," said Leezibeth. "I wish it had been ordained that we should get nae mair weat than the farmers want—it is just a wastery o' the elements to hae rain pourin' down like that."

Then Coquette began to inquire why her uncle had not yet come to see her ; and Leezibeth explained that the Minister was fairly buried alive in his books ever since he had begun seriously to work at his Concordance. So she ran downstairs, and went into the study, and went up to him and dutifully kissed him.

The Minister looked up with dazed eyes, and a pleased look came into the sad grey face.

"You have come back, my bairn ? And you are well ? And you have enjoyed yourself in Glasgow ?"

He failed to notice the somewhat tired air that had not escaped Leezibeth's keen scrutiny.

"You have been hard at work, uncle, I can see ; and I am come back to interrupt it."

"Why ?" said the Minister, in some alarm.

"Because I cannot let you kill yourself with your books. When the weather does become fine again, you will go out with me, and leave your books alone for a time."

"I cannot do that," he said, looking at the sheets before him. "I have purposed having this work finished by the end o' the year, so that, if I am spared and in health, I might even undertake another with the incoming o' the new year. But sometimes I fear my labour will be thrown away. I am not familiar wi' the booksellers and such persons as undertake to bring out new works. The expense of it would be far too great for my own means, and yet I do not know how to recommend it to the notice of those whose business it is to embark money in such enterprises. I do not desire any profit or proceeds from the sale of the book, but I am not sufficiently acquainted

with such things to know whether that will be an inducement. The cost of bringing out such a work must be great—Mr. Gillespie, the schoolmaster, did even mention so large a sum as one hundred pounds, but I am afraid not with sufficient caution or knowledge.”

Coquette knelt down beside the old man, and took his hand in both of hers.

“Uncle,” she said, “I am going to ask you for a great favour.”

“And what is it?”

“No, you must promise first.”

“It is impossible—it is contrary to the teaching of Scripture to promise what it may be impossible to perform,” said the Minister, who was perhaps vaguely influenced by the story of the daughter of Herodias.

“Ah, well, it does not matter. Uncle, I want you to let me be your publisher.”

“What do you mean, Catherine?”

“Let me publish your book for you. You know my papa did leave me some money; it is useless to me; I do nothing with it; it becomes more and more every year, and does nothing for anybody. This would be an amusement for me. I will take your book, uncle; and you shall have no more of bother with it; and I will get it printed; and my Cousin Tom—he will send me word how the people do buy it in Glasgow.”

“But—but—but—” stammered the Minister, who could scarcely understand at first this astounding proposal, “my child, this generosity you propose might entail serious loss, which I should feel more than if it were my own. It is a grave matter, this publishing of a book—it is one that young people cannot understand, and is not lightly to be undertaken. We will put aside this offer of yours, Catherine——”

“No, uncle, you must not,” she said, gently, as she rose and put her hand on his shoulder. And then she drooped her head somewhat, as if in shame, and said to him in a low voice, quite close to his ear: “If my mamma were here, she would do it for you, uncle, and so you must let me.”

And then she kissed him again, and went away to call the boys, who were rather anxiously awaiting that summons.

They were taken up to her sitting-room, and thither also came Leezibeth, partly to preserve order, and partly to open one of Coquette's boxes, which was placed on a side-table. Coquette, by this time, had plucked up her spirits a little bit. The fire was burning more brightly in the room; and Leezibeth had prepared some tea for her. And so, when this box was finally opened, she proceeded to display its contents in the fashion of a small show-woman; delivering a grave lecture to the circle of boys, who looked on as hungry-eyed as hawks. That decorum did not last long. In a very little while there was a turmoil in the room, and boyish shrieks of laughter over Coquette's ironical jokes went pealing all over the house. For she had brought this for that cousin, and that for the other one; and there was a great deal of blushing, of confused thanks, and of outrageous merriment. Coquette seemed to have purchased an inexhaustible store of presents; and what astonished them more than all was the exceeding appropriateness and exceptional value of those gifts.

"Look here, Coquette," said Dugald, "who told you I lost that knife with the corkscrew and the gimlet and the file in it—for this ane is jist the same?"

"Look here, Dugald," remarked the young lady, standing before him. "Will you please to tell me how you addressed me just now?"

"Oh," said Dugald, boldly, "the Whaup never called ye anything else, and ye seemed well enough pleased."

Here there was some covert laughter at Coquette's expense; for these young gentlemen had formed their own notion of the relations between their brother and Coquette.

"Then," she said, "when you are as tall as the Whaup, and as respectful to me as he is, you may call me Coquette; but not till then, Master Dugald."

In the midst of all this noise, a sudden lull occurred. Coquette turned and saw the tall, spare figure of her uncle at the half-opened door, where he had been for some time an unperceived and amused spectator of the proceedings. One or two of the boys had caught sight of him, and had instantly curbed their wild merriment. But even although this was Saturday, it was clear the Minister was not in an ..

impatient mood with their uproar. On the contrary, he walked into the room, and over to Coquette, and put his hand affectionately on her head.

"You are a very good girl, Catherine," he said.

The boys looked on this demonstration of kindness with the utmost surprise. Seldom, indeed, had they seen their father forget that rigour of demeanour which the people in many parts of Scotland retain as the legacy of Puritanical reticence in all matters of the feelings and emotions. And then the compliment he paid to her !

"I hope you are not being troubled by those unruly boys, who have much to learn in manners," said the Minister, with a tranquil gravity. "But Leezibeth must see to that ; and so, since you are come home, Catherine, I begin to think I should like to hear the sound of music again. I think the Manse has not been quite so cheerful since you left, somehow ; and I have missed you much in the evenings. As for music, I have had occasion lately to notice how much King David was in the habit of speaking of it, and of musical instruments, and the singing of the voice. Perhaps we in this country have an unwarrantable prejudice against music—an exercise that we know the chosen people of the Lord prized highly."

It was now Leezibeth's turn to be astonished. To hear the Minister ask for music on a Saturday—the day of his studying the sermon ; and to hear him disagree with the estimation in which that godless pastime was held by all decent, sober-minded, responsible folk, were matters for deep reflection to her, and not a little surprise and pain. Yet in her secret heart she was not sorry that Coquette sat down to the piano. Had she dared, she would have asked her to sing one of the old Scotch songs that had first drawn her towards the young French girl.

But Coquette, also remembering that it was Saturday, began to play "Drumclog ;" and the beating of the wind and rain without was soon lost in the solemn and stately harmonies of that fine old air. And then, as in days gone by, she played it sharply and triumphantly ; and a thrill went through the Minister's heart. He drew his chair nearer to the piano ; and heard the close of the brief performance with a sigh.

"Catherine," he said, rather absently, "was there not a song you used to sing about returning to your home after being away from it for a time? It was a French song, I think; and yet the music of it seemed to me praiseworthy."

"I do know that song," said Coquette, in a low voice. "But—but—I cannot sing it any more."

The Minister did not notice the distress that was visible on her face.

"Yet perhaps you remember the music sufficiently to play it on the instrument without the help of the voice," said the grey-haired old man—apparently forgetting altogether that the boys were in the room, and Leezibeth at the door.

Coquette began to play the air. It was the song that told of the happy return to France after three long years of absence. She had returned to her home, it is true—leaving behind her many wild, and sad, and beautiful memories; and now that she was back at Airlie, it seemed as though the desolate wind and rain outside were but typical of the life that awaited her here. Coquette played the air as if she were in a dream; and, at last, her cousin Dugald, standing at the end of the piano, was surprised to see her face get more and more bent down, and her fingering of the keys more and more uncertain.

"What for are ye greetin'?" he said to her, gently; but Coquette could make no answer.

CHAPTER XLVII.

AN APPARITION.

COQUETTE had never got accustomed to the depressing stillness and gloom of the Sabbath as it was kept at Airlie; and on this, the first morning of what seemed to be the beginning of a new era of her life, she almost feared what she would have to encounter. She dreaded the death-like silence of the neighbourhood; the sombre procession of the people to church; the sharp, imperative jangle of the bell; and then the long, drowsy, monotonous day spent indoors, with the melancholy sound of Leezibeth reading aloud to

herself in the kitchen. Once, as she lay ill, she talked to Leezibeth about the pleasant Sundays she had learnt to love in her youth—the cheerful gathering of friends and acquaintances at the small church in the early morning—the mysterious music—the solemn lights in the recesses of the building : then out into the clear air again, and home to meet all manner of relatives and friends who had come to spend a quiet holiday. Against all this, Leezibeth naturally protested strongly ; and even warmed into poetic language, as elderly Scotchwomen will, who have been familiar all their life with the picturesque phraseology of the Bible.

“It is the day set apart,” she said ; “it is the day of the Lord ; and He walks about on that day, and looks on what He has made, as it was efter a new creation.”

“And are you afraid of Him,” said Coquette, as she lay half-dreaming on the sofa ; “are you afraid of Him, that you all keep indoors on that day, and scarce speak to each other, and let no sound be heard ? ”

On this particular morning the whole world was steeped in gloom. The storm had so far abated that the trees no longer bent before the wind, and there was no rain ; but overhead and stretching far to the horizon was a pall of thick, lurid, steel-blue cloud ; and the mountains of Arran threw sombre shadows deep down into the cold grey of the sea. The fir woods near at hand seemed almost black ; those on the slopes going southward lay as a series of dusky and indistinguishable patches on the misty greys and greens of the landscape. The road going across the moor had been washed red ; and the rapid and drumly stream had overflown its narrow banks.

The boys were in their Sunday clothes, and were secretly caressing in their pockets during the time of family worship the presents Coquette had brought them from Glasgow. Leezibeth was particular that Coquette should put on thick boots, as the roads were so wet ; and by-and-by, after much hurrying, and whispering, and admonition, they all set out for church.

It was a cheerless day, cold and damp ; and the wind had a raw feeling about it. The cracked bell of the old church was pealing out its summons, and up from Airlie

came the struggling and solemn procession of people, seemingly afraid to speak to each other, nearly all of them dressed in stiff and ungainly black garments. Fortunately for Coquette, she was overtaken by an old friend of hers; and she welcomed him gladly; for she knew that he would talk to her even to the church door. It was the Pensioner.

"And I wass told you would pe pack, Miss Cassilis," said Neil, "and richt glad was I to hear't; and how is that you will like Glasgow?"

"I did like it very much," said Coquette.

"Oh, it is sa grand place—but you will need to know where to go for sa goot whisky before you will go to Glasgow."

Coquette hinted that she had not discovered the pet public-house that Neil evidently had in his mind's eye; whereupon the old Highlandman was profuse and earnest in his apologies—he had not "meant it was for sa likes o' her to think o' a public-house," and so forth.

Just at this moment, when the party from the Manse had nearly reached the path across the moor to the church, and were therefore on the point of joining the slow stream of people that came up from the village, the noise of a carriage was heard behind them. Instantly all the faces of the people were turned. Such a sound had rarely indeed been heard at Airlie on a Sunday morning; and there was a manifest lingering on the moorland road to see who this might be that was outraging the solemn and decorous gravity of the Sabbath.

Coquette, the Pensioner, Leezibeth, and the boys, stepped to one side, to let the carriage pass. But it had not passed them when the loud voice of a woman was heard ordering the driver to stop. The vehicle, indeed, halted close by the party from the Manse; and Coquette found to her astonishment and dismay that she was confronted by the woman who had walked up to Lord Earlshope and herself in the Park.

"What! The little Spanish princess!" cried the woman, with her bold, black eyes fixed on the girl with a look of impudent merriment. "So this is where you come from, is it? Here, won't you shake hands with me?"

She sat round in the carriage, and put her hand over the

side. Coquette shrank back a step, and inadvertently caught hold of Neil's arm.

"She is afraid of me," said the woman in the carriage to her companion—another woman, less gaudily dressed, who sat opposite her. "She cuts me! Our country beauties are proud! But you were not born and bred in this desolate hole, were you?" she added, addressing Coquette.

The girl was too much alarmed to reply. The whole scene was visible to the people, who made no pretence of walking on to the church, but stopped and stared at the strange spectacle of a bold, red-faced, impudent woman addressing the Minister's niece, and breaking the stillness of the Sabbath morning with her loud talking and her indecent laughter.

The scene only lasted for a couple of seconds, however. The Pensioner walked boldly up to the side of the carriage, and said—

"What is it you will want wis sa Minister's niece?"

For reply, he got a handful of raisins and almonds tossed into his face; and then, with another shriek of laughter, in which her companion joined, the woman called aloud to her coachman—

"Drive on to Earlshope."

"To Earlshope!" whispered the villagers among themselves; and then they looked at Coquette, who, pale and yet apparently self-possessed, had crossed into the path with Leezibeth, and was already walking slowly towards the church.

For an instant or two the Pensioner stood looking at the retreating carriage, his whole frame trembling with rage at the insult he had received. Of the rapid Gaelic he uttered there and then it was fortunate the villagers could overhear or understand but little. Then, with a proud and dignified air, he drew up his shoulders, and marched in military fashion after Coquette, whom he overtook.

"Earlshope! Earlshope!" said the old man, puffing and snorting with indignation. "It will be no Earlshope she will see sa day. Oh, I will know all about it. We wass warned—and when his lordship did ride away this morning, his last words was about this leddy that might be for coming to look at sa house."

"Was Lord Earlshope here this morning?" said Coquette, quickly.

The Pensioner was startled to find what he had done. In his indignation, he had told not only what he knew himself, but also that which had been given him as a profound secret by the housekeeper. Never in his life before had he been so indiscreet; and in his perplexity and consternation he made wild and desperate efforts to recover the ownership of these mysteries.

"No, no, no!" he said, hurriedly, and with every token of vexation. "It will be all nonsense that a woman has put into my head. His lordship at Earlshope? He hasna been sare for many and many's a day, as sure as I will be pörn!"

The Pensioner gave this last assurance with a downcast head and in a sort of anxious whisper; for they were now near the church door, where outspoken lies might be dangerous cattle to deal with. Coquette's calm eyes looked at the old man, and saw his perturbation. She perceived that he had unintentionally revealed a secret. Lord Earlshope had left the neighbourhood only that morning; and with that, and this wild escapade of his wife, to think over—even if she had nothing of her own to trouble her mind—she entered the small building. For a moment she could not help reflecting that if, instead of listening to the harsh psalm-singing, she could have gone away and knelt down all by herself in one of the small, twilight recesses in a certain little chapel on the Loire, she would have been happy. It would have been to her like bending down once more at her mother's knee.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

EARLSHOPE IS INVADED.

MEANWHILE the carriage had been driven to the gates of Earlshope. The lodgekeeper came out, and naturally opened the gates, although sufficiently surprised to see anybody arrive at such a time. When, at last, the landau arrived at the house, the occupants alighted. The house-

keeper was already standing there, in front of the open door, glaring defiance.

The first of the two women walked up the stone steps in a slow and pompous fashion, and, with an air of mock-heroic gravity, produced a card, on which was printed *Mrs. Smith Arnold*.

"Deed no!" said the housekeeper, rather incoherently.

Mrs. Arnold looked at her companion, and shrugged her shoulders.

"My good woman, I suppose you can't read. That is not a begging letter. It is a card. I have the permission of Lord Earlshope to look over the house: I don't mean to steal anything, but you may come with us wherever we go, if you please."

The housekeeper began to wax warm.

"Canna read! I can read weel aneugh; and what I say is, that not one step into this house will ye gang the day, his lordship's permission or no permission."

"What do you mean, woman?" said Mrs. Arnold, with an assumption of haughtiness.

"I mean what I say," said the Scotchwoman, doggedly. "And I havena been kept frae the kirk a' for nothing, as ye'll find out, gin ye attempt ony o' your fine airs wi' me."

These latter words were spoken rather hotly; and both the women who stood before her looked surprised. However, the so-called Mrs. Arnold picked up some temper, and merely exclaiming—"Oh, the creature's mad!" brushed past into the house, along with her companion. Lord Earlshope's plenipotentiary was at once stupefied and powerless. In order to avoid a public scandal on the Sabbath morning, she had sent the other servants to church, confident that her own authority would be sufficient to repulse any casual visitor. Now she found the house invaded by two strange women, and she was placed in an awkward dilemma. If she went through the house with them, she would condone their offence, and be unable to eject them; if she went for help to the lodge, they, in the meantime, might pillage and plunder in every direction. Eventually, after a moment of incensed hesitation, she followed them.

And gradually she perceived that they were not thieves.

Indeed, Mrs. Smith Arnold betrayed a singular acquaintance with many objects in the house, particularly in a small drawing-room or morning-room which Lord Earlshope was scarcely ever known to enter.

"But where is my portrait?" she said.

"*Your* portrait!" repeated the housekeeper, with all her indignation welling up again.

"Woman, you are an ass—a microcephalous idiot in fact; but you don't know it, and it is no matter. He might have brought my portrait here; it is a dull hole, and it might have cheered him. And this is the place he used to talk about with something like rapture! Good heavens! it is dismal as a church. Look at the deserted country and the bare shore and the black sea. What's the name of those mountains over there?"

"Ye had better ask them," said the housekeeper, "since ye can make free enough to come into a strange house, and talk as if everything belonged to ye!"

"And so it does—so it does; that is the joke of it. You would understand it if you were not such an ass, my good woman; but I am afraid you are a very stupid person."

"Are ye going to leave this house?" said the housekeeper, in a blaze of anger.

But the temper of the housekeeper was nothing to the sudden passion that shot into the black eyes of this woman, as she said—

"Don't talk to me! I tell you, don't talk to me, or I will dash a bottle of vitriol in your face, and blind you, blind you, blind you!"

Then she burst into an ironical laugh.

"What a fool you are—an ass—an idiot! You haven't got the brains of a slow-worm. My good woman, believe me, you are an ass!"

She began to turn over the things on the table—books, photographs, cards, and what not. The housekeeper started and listened. There was a sound of footsteps on the stair. In a minute or two, the Pensioner made his appearance at the door, tall and erect.

At the sight of this ally, all the housekeeper's courage and anger returned. She denounced the strangers as thieves

and pick-pockets. She appealed to the Pensioner to help her. She conjured him to turn them out of the house.

"Sat is what I will do," observed Neil, advancing calmly, with the sort of deferential and yet firm air of the private soldier.

"Please, mem, will ye go, or will I pit ye out o' sa house?"

"Lay a finger on me, and I will set fire to the place, and burn you and it into cinders. Savages that you are—and idiots!"

"You will say what you please," observed Neil, who probably considered these phrases as rather feeble when compared with some that he knew in his native tongue; "but I mean to put ye both out o' sa house. I will not strike you—Cootness knaws; but I will jist tek ye up, one by one, and carry ye down sa stairs, and out into sa gairden, and leave ye there. Will ye go, or will ye not go?"

"Do you know who I am, you idiot?" cried the woman, with her face grown purple with passion.

Her companion laid her hand on her arm; she shook her off.

"I do not care," said the Pensioner.

"I am Lady Earlshope, you ignorant brutes and beasts!" she cried. "And I will have every one of you starved until a crow would not pick your eyes out, and I'll have you whipped, and starved, you ignorant hounds!"

"Lady Earlshope!" said the housekeeper, rather falling back.

The quieter of the two women again interposed and endeavoured to pacify her companion. She, indeed, seemed rather frightened. Eventually, however, she managed to get her infuriated mistress coaxed out of the room and down the stair; and as they were descending they nearly stumbled over a third person—the lodgekeeper, who, fancying that there was something amiss, had come along out of curiosity.

"Who are you?" she asked. "Oh, I remember. I suppose you have been listening. Well, you can go and tell your babbling neighbours of the reception Lady Earlshope met with in her own house."

And that is precisely what the man did. He had overheard much of the stormy scene in the drawing-room, and,

being of a prudent disposition, did not wish to have anything to do with it. When the carriage drove off, he went quietly back to the lodge, leaving the housekeeper and the Pensioner under the delusion that they alone knew the relationship of this woman to Lord Earlshope. But the lodgekeeper revealed the secret, in an awe-stricken way, to his wife; who whispered it, in profound confidence, to one of the female servants; who subsequently told it to her mother in the village.

There it ran the round, with such exaggerations and comments as may be imagined; and if Coquette had been looked on rather askance from the moment of her coming to Airlie, this news placed her under the ban of a definite suspicion, and even horror. What were her relations with the drunken and passionate woman who had accosted her, in the open face of day, on that memorable Sabbath morning? What was the meaning of her intimacy with Lord Earlshope, and the cause of his visits to the Manse ever since she had come to live there?

Even the children caught the fever of distrust, and avoided Coquette. That would have been a bitter thing for her to bear, had she noticed it; but she was perhaps too much occupied then with her own sad thoughts. Nor was the Minister aware that his own conduct in harbouring this girl was forming the subject of serious remark in the village. The excuses made for him were in themselves accusations. He was withdrawn from worldly affairs. He was engrossed in his books. He was liable to be imposed on. All this was said; but none the less was it felt that the duty of looking sharply after the conduct of his household and the persons around him was specially incumbent on one whose business it was to see narrowly to the interests of the Church, and set an example to his Christian brethren.

CHAPTER XLIX.

COQUETTE'S SONG.

For a long period Coquette's life at Airlie was so uneventful that it may be dismissed with the briefest notice. It seemed to her that she had passed through that season of youth and

springtime when romance and love and anticipation ought to colour for a brief while the atmosphere round a human existence as if with rainbows. That was all over—if, indeed, it had ever occurred to her. There was now but a sad, grey monotony ; a going by of the weeks and months in this remote moorland place, where the people seemed hard, unimpressible, unfriendly. She began to acquire notions of duty. She began to devise charitable occupations for herself. She even began various studies which could never by any chance be of use to her. And she grew almost to love the slow, melancholy droning by the old Scotch folk of those desolating passages in the Prophets which told of woe and wrath and the swift end of things, or which, still more appropriately, dealt with the vanity of life, and the shortness of man's days.

The Whaup would sometimes talk of marriage—she put it farther and farther off. He seldom indeed came to Airlie ; his hospital-work kept him busy ; and he was eagerly looking forward to the junior partnership that Dr. Menzies had promised him. But on one of these rare visits he said to his cousin—

“ Coquette, you are growing very like a Scotch girl.”

“ Why ? ” she asked.

“ In manner, I mean ; not in appearance. You are not as demonstrative as you used to be. You appear more settled, prosaic, matter-of-fact. You have lost all your old childish caprices ; and you no longer appear to be so pleased with every little thing that happens. You are much graver than you used to be.”

“ Do you think so ? ” she said, absently.

“ But when we are married I mean to take you away from this slow place, and introduce you to lots of pleasant people, and brighten you up into the old Coquette.”

“ I am very content to be here,” she said, quietly.

“ Content ! Is that all you ask for ? Content ! I suppose a nun is content with a stone cell eight feet square. But you were not intended to be content ; you must be delighted, and you shall be delighted. Coquette, you never laugh now ! ”

“ And you,” she said, “ you are grown much serious too.”

“ Oh, well,” he said, “ I have such a deal to think about.

One has to drop robbing people's gardens some day or other."

"I have some things to think about also," she said—"not always to make me laugh."

"What troubles you, then, Coquette?" he demanded gently.

"Oh, I cannot be asked questions, and questions always," she said, with a trace of fretful impatience, which was a startling surprise to him. "I have much to do in the village, with the children—and the parents, they do seem afraid of me."

The Whaup regarded her silently, with rather a pained look in his face; and then she, looking up, seemed to become aware that she had spoken harshly. She put her hand on his hand, and said—

"You must not be angry with me, Tom. I do often find myself getting vexed, I do not know why; and I ask myself, if I do stay long enough at Airlie, whether I shall become like Leezibeth and her husband."

"You shall not stay long enough to try," said the Whaup, cheerfully.

Then he went away up to Glasgow, determined to work day and night to achieve his dearest hopes. Sometimes he reflected, when he heard his fellow-students tell of their gay adventures with their sweethearts, that his sweetheart, in bidding him good-bye, had never given him one kiss. And on each occasion that he went down to Airlie, Coquette seemed to him to be growing more and more like the beautiful and sad Madonnas of early Italian art, and he scarce dared to think of kissing her.

So the days went by, and the slow, humdrum life of Airlie crept through the seasons, bringing the people a little nearer to the churchyard up on the moor that had received their fathers and their forefathers. The Minister worked away with a patient earnestness at his Concordance to the Psalms; and had the pride of a young author in thinking of its becoming a real, bound book with the opening of the new year. Coquette went systematically and gravely about her charitable works in the village, and took no notice of the ill-favour with which her efforts were regarded. All that summer and winter Earlshope remained empty.

One evening, in the beginning of the new year, Mr. Gillespie the Schoolmaster came up to the Manse, and was admitted into the study, where Coquette and her uncle sat together, busy with an array of proof-sheets. The Schoolmaster had a communication to make. Mr. Cassilis, enjoying the strange excitement and responsibility of correcting the sheets of a work which would afterwards bear his name, was forced to beg the Schoolmaster to be brief; and he, thus goaded, informed them, after a short preamble, that Earlshope was to be sold.

The Schoolmaster was pleased with the surprise which his news produced. Indeed, he had come resolved to watch the effect of these tidings upon the Minister's niece, so that he might satisfy his mind of her being in secret collusion with the young Lord of Earlshope; and he now glared at her through his gold spectacles. She had started on hearing the intelligence—so that she was evidently unacquainted with it; and yet she showed no symptoms of regret over an event which clearly betokened Lord Earlshope's final withdrawal from the country.

"A strange, even an unaccountable thing, it may be termed," observed the Schoolmaster, "inasmuch as his lordship was no spendthrift, and had surely as much as could satisfy all his wants or necessities, as one might say. Yet he has aye been a singular young man—which may have been owing, or caused by, certain circumstances, or relationships of which you have doubtless heard, Mr. Cassilis."

"I have heard too much of the vain talking of the neighbourhood about his lordship and his affairs," said the Minister, impatiently turning to his proofs.

"I will venture to say, Mr. Cassilis," remarked the Schoolmaster, who was somewhat nettled, "that it is no vain talking, as no one has been heard to deny that he is a married man."

"Dear me!" said the Minister, looking up. "Of what concern is it to either you or me, Mr. Gillespie, whether he is a married man or not?"

The Schoolmaster was rather stunned. He looked at Coquette. She sat apparently unimpressible and still. He heaved a sigh, and shook his head; and then he rose.

"It is the duty o' a Christian—which I humbly hope

that I am, sir,—no' to think ill of his neighbours; but I confess, Mr. Cassilis, ye go forward a length in that airt, or direction, I might term it rather, which is surprising."

The Minister rose also.

"Let me see you through the passage, Mr. Gillespie, which is dark at these times. I do not claim for myself, however, any especial charity in this matter; for I would observe that it is not always to a man's disfavour to believe him married."

As the passage was in reality exceedingly dark, the Schoolmaster could not tell whether there was in the Minister's eye a certain humorous twinkle which he had sometimes observed there, and which, to tell the truth, he did not particularly like, for it generally accompanied a severe rebuke. However, the Schoolmaster had done his duty. The Minister was warned; and if any of his household were led astray, the village of Airlie could wash its hands of the matter.

At last there came people to make Earlshope ready for the auctioneer's hammer; and then there was a great sale, and the big house was gutted and shut up. But neither it nor the estate was sold; though strangers came from time to time to look at both.

Once more the still moorland neighbourhood returned to its quiet ways; and Coquette went the round of her simple duties, lessening day by day the vague prejudice which had somehow been stirred up against her. It was with no such intention, certainly, that she laboured; it was enough if the days passed, and if the Whaup were content to cease writing for a definite answer about that marriage which was yet far away in the future. Leezibeth looked on this new phase of the girl's character with an esteem and approval tempered by something like awe. She could not tell what had taken away from her all the old gaiety, and wilfulness, and carelessness. Strangely enough, too, Leezibeth was less her confidante now; and on the few occasions that Lady Drum came over to Airlie, the old lady was surprised to find Coquette grown almost distant and reserved in manner. Indeed, the girl was as much alone there as if she had been afloat on a raft at sea. All hope of change, of excitement, of pleasure, seemed to have left her. She

seldom opened the piano ; and, when she did, "Drumclog" was no longer a martial air, but a plaintive wail of grief.

Perhaps, of all the people around her, the one that noticed most of her low spirits was the Whaup's young brother Dugald, of whom she had made a sort of pet. Very often she took him with her on her missions into the village, or her walks into the country round. And one day, as they were sitting on the moor, she said to him—

"I suppose you never heard of an old German song that is very strange and sad ? I wonder if I can remember the words and repeat them to you. They are something like this—

Three horsemen rode out to the gate of the town : Good-bye !
 Fine-Sweetheart, she looked from her window down : Good-bye !
 And if ill fate such grief must bring
 'Then reach me hither your golden ring !
 Good-bye ! Good-bye ! Good-bye !
 Ah, parting wounds so bitterly !

And it is Death that parts us so : Good-bye !
 Many a rose-red maiden must go : Good-bye !
 He sunders many a man from wife :
 They knew how happy a thing was life.
 Good-bye ! Good-bye ! Good-bye !
 Ah, parting wounds so bitterly !

He steals the infant out of its bed : Good-bye !
 And when shall I see my nut-brown maid ? Good-bye !
 It is not to-morrow : ah, were it to-day,
 There are two that I know that would be gay !
 Good-bye ! Good-bye ! Good-bye !
 Ah, parting wounds so bitterly !

"What does it mean ?" asked the boy.

"I think it means," said Coquette, looking away over the moor, "that everybody in the world is miserable."

"And are you miserable, too ?" he asked.

"Not more than others, I suppose," said Coquette.

CHAPTER L.

COQUETTE FORSAKES HER FRIENDS.

THE dull, grey atmosphere that thus hung over Coquette's life was about to be pierced by a lightning-flash.

Two years had passed away in a quiet, monotonous

fashion ; and very little had happened during that time to the people about Airlie. The Minister, it is true, had published his Concordance to the Psalms ; and not only had he received various friendly and congratulatory letters about it from clergymen standing high in the estimation of the world, but notice had been taken of the work in the public prints, and that in a manner to fill the old man's heart with secret joy. Coquette cut out those paragraphs which were laudatory (suppressing ruthlessly those which were not) and placed them in a book. Indeed, she managed the whole business ; and, especially in the monetary portion of it, insisted on keeping her negotiations with the publishers a profound secret.

"It is something for me to do, uncle," she said.

"And you have done it very well, Catherine," said the Minister. "I am fair surprised to see what a goodly volume it has turned out—the smooth paper—the clear printing : it is altogether what I would call a presentable book."

The Minister would have been less surprised had he known the reckless fashion in which Coquette had given instructions to the publishers, and the amount of money she subsequently and surreptitiously and cheerfully paid.

"There are newspapers," said the Minister, "which they tell me deal in a light and profane fashion wi' religious matters. I hope the editors will read my Concordance carefully, before writing of it in their journals."

"I do not think it is the editor who writes about books," remarked Coquette. "An editor of a Nantes newspaper did use to come to our house, and I remember his saying to my papa, that he gave books to his writers who could do nothing else ; so you must not be surprised if they do make mistakes. As for him, uncle, I am sure he did not know who wrote the Psalms."

"Very likely—very likely," said the Minister. "But the editors of our newspapers are a different class of men, for they write for a religious nation and must be acquainted wi' such things. The Schoolmaster thinks I ought to write to the editors, and beg them to read the book wi' care."

"I wouldn't do that, uncle, if I were you," said Coquette ; and somehow or other, the Minister had of late got into

such a habit of consulting and obeying Coquette that her simple expression of opinion sufficed, and he did not write to any editor.

At times during that long period, but not often, the Whaup came down to Airlie, and stayed from the Saturday to the Monday morning. The anxious and troubled way in which Coquette put aside any reference to their future marriage struck him painfully ; but for the present he was content to be almost silent. There was no use, he reflected, in talking about this matter until he could definitely say to her, "Come, and be my wife." He had no right to press her to give any more definite promise than she had already given, when he himself was uncertain as to time. But, even now, he saw at no great distance ahead the fortunate moment when he could formally claim Coquette as his bride. Every day that he rose, he knew himself a day nearer to the time when he should go down to Airlie and carry off with him Coquette to be the wonder of all his friends in Glasgow.

Sometimes, as he looked at Coquette, he felt rather anxious ; and wished that the days could pass more quickly.

"I am afraid the dulness of this place is weighing very heavily on you, Coquette," he said to her one Saturday afternoon that he had got down.

"You do say that often to me," she said, "and I find you looking at me as if you were a doctor. Yet I am not ill. It is true, I think that I am becoming Scotch, as you said once long ago ; and all your Scotch people at Airlie seem to me sad and resigned in their faces. That is no harm, is it ?"

"But why should you be sad and resigned ?"

"I do catch it as an infection from the others," she said with a smile.

Yet he was not satisfied ; and he went back to Glasgow more impatient than ever.

"For," he said to himself, "once I can go and ask her to fulfil her promise, there will be a chance of breaking this depressing calm that has settled on her. I will take her away from Airlie. I will get three months' holidays, and take her down to see the Loire, and then along to Marseilles, and then on to Italy, and then back through

Switzerland. And only think of Coquette being always with me ; and my having to order breakfast for her ; and see that the wine is always quite sound and good for her ; and see that she is wrapped up against the cold ; and to listen always to her sweet voice, and the broken English, and the little perplexed stammer now and again—isn't that something to work for ? Hurry on, days, and weeks, and months, and bring Coquette to me ! ”

So the time went by, and Coquette had no news of Lord Earlshope—there was not even the mention of his name. But one dull morning in March, she was walking by herself over the moor ; and suddenly she heard on the gravel of the path in front of her a quick footstep that she seemed to recognise. Her heart stood still, and for a second she felt faint and giddy. Then, without ever lifting her head, she endeavoured to turn aside and avoid him.

“ Won't you even speak to me, Coquette ? ”

The sound of his voice made the blood spring hotly to her face again, and recalled the beating of her heart ; but still she remained immovable. And then she answered, in a low voice—

“ Yes, I will speak to you if you wish.”

He came nearer to her—his own face quite pale—and said—

“ I am glad you have nearly forgotten me, Coquette ; I came to see. I heard that you looked very sad, and went about alone much, and were pale ; but I would rather hear you tell me, Coquette, that it is all a mistake.”

“ I have not forgotten anything,” said Coquette.

“ Nothing ? ”

“ Nothing at all.”

“ Coquette,” he cried, coming quite close to her, “ tell me this—once for all—have you forgotten nothing as I have forgotten nothing ?—do you love me as if we had just parted yesterday ?—has all this time done nothing for either of us ? ”

She looked round, wildly, as if seeking some means of escape ; and then, with a sort of shudder, she found his arms round her as in the olden time, and she was saying, almost incoherently—

“ Oh, my dearest, my dearest, I love you more than ever

—night and day I have never ceased to think of you—and now—now my only wish is to die—here, with your arms round me !”

“Listen, Coquette, listen !” he said. “Do you know what I have done ? A ship passes here in the morning for America : I have taken two berths in it, for you and for me : to-morrow we shall be sailing away to a new world, and leaving all those troubles behind us. Do you hear me, Coquette ?”

The girl trembled violently : her face was hidden.

“You remember that woman,” he said, hurriedly. “Nothing has been heard of her for two years. I have sought everywhere for her. She must be dead. And so, Coquette, you know, we shall be married when we get out there ; and perhaps in after years we may return to Airlie. But now, Coquette, this is what you must do ; the *Caroline* will be waiting off Saltcoats to-night ; you must go down by yourself ; and I will tell you how to have the gig come for you. And then we are to intercept the ship, darling ; and to-morrow you will have turned your face to a new world, and will soon forget this old one, that was so cruel to you. What do you say, Coquette ?”

“Oh, I cannot, I cannot !” murmured the girl. “What will become of my uncle ?”

“Your uncle is an old man. He would have been as lonely if you had never come to Airlie, Coquette ; and we may come back to see him.”

She looked up now, with a white face, into his eyes, and said slowly—

“You know that if we go away to-night I shall never see him again—nor any one of my friends.”

He shrank somehow from that earnest look ; but none the less he continued his eager and piteous pleadings. “What are friends to you, Coquette ?” he said. “They cannot make you happy.”

It was but a little while thereafter that Coquette was on her way back to the Manse, alone. She had promised to go down to Saltcoats that night, and she had sealed her sin with a kiss.

She scarcely knew what she had done ; and yet there was a dreadful consciousness of some impending evil pressing

upon her heart. Her eyes were fixed on the ground as she went along; and yet it seemed to her that she knew the dark clouds were glowing with a fiery crimson, and that there was a light as of sunset glaring over the moor. Then, so still it was! She grew afraid that in this fearful silence she should hear a voice speaking to her from the sky that appeared to be close over her head.

Guilty and trembling she drew near to the Manse; and, seeing the Minister coming out of the gate, she managed to avoid him, and stole like a culprit up to her own room. The first thing that met her eyes was a locket containing a portrait of her mother. She took it up, and placed it in a drawer, along with a crucifix and some religious books to which Leezibeth had objected. She put it beside them reverently and sadly—as though she knew she never dared touch them any more. And then she sat down, and buried her face in her hands.

She was unusually and tenderly attentive to her uncle at dinner-time; and in answer to his inquiries why she scarcely ate anything, she said that she had taken her accustomed biscuit and glass of port wine—which Dr. Menzies had recommended—later than usual. The answer did not quite satisfy the Minister.

“We must have Lady Drum to take ye away for a change,” he said, “some o’ these days.”

When she had brought her uncle the silk handkerchief with which he generally covered his face in anticipation of his after-dinner nap, Coquette went upstairs, and placed a few odd things in a small reticule. She came downstairs again, and waited patiently until tea was over, and the boys sent off to prepare their lessons for the next day.

Then Coquette, having put on her shawl and hat, stole out of the house, and through the small garden. She looked neither to the right nor to the left. Of all the troubles she had experienced in life, the bitterest was nothing in comparison to the ghastly sense of guilt that now crushed her down. She knew that in leaving the Manse she was leaving behind her all the sweet consciousness of rectitude, the purity and innocence which had enabled her to meet trials with a courageous heart. She was leaving behind her the treasure of a stainless name, the

crown of womanhood. She was leaving behind her her friends, who would have to share her shame, who would have to face on her behalf the cruel tongues of the world. She was leaving behind her even the treasured memories of her mother—for Heaven itself would be closed against her, and she would be an exile from all that a pure and true woman could hold dear.

There were no tears in her eyes ; but there was a cold, dead feeling at her heart ; and she trembled at the slight sound she made in closing the gate.

What a strange, wild evening it was, as she got outside, and turned to cross the moor over to the west. Through a fierce glare of sunset, she could see that all along the horizon there stood a wall of dense and mysterious blue cloud. Underneath this the sea lay black ; the wind had not stirred the waves into breaking ; and she could only tell that the great dark plain moved in lines and lines, as if it were silently brooding over the secrets down in its depths. But above this dense wall of cloud flared the wild light of the sunset, with long fierce dashes of scarlet and gold ; while across the blaze of yellow there drifted streaks of pure silver, showing the coming of a storm. Up here on the moor, the stretches of dry grey grass which alternated with brown patches of heather had, as it were, caught fire ; and the blowing and gusty light of the west burned along those bleak slopes until the eye was dazzled and pained by the glow. Even in the far east the clouds had a blush of pink over them, with rifts of green sky between ; and the dark fir woods that lay along the horizon seemed to dwell within a veil of crimson mist.

There was a strange stillness around, despite the fact that the wind was sufficient to move the flaming clouds hither and thither, causing now this and now that stretch of the grey moor to burn red under the shifting evening sky. There was quite an unusual silence, indeed. The birds seemed to have grown mute ; not even the late blackbird sang in the hawthorn bushes by the side of the moorland stream. Coquette hurried on, without letting her eyes wander this way or that ; there was something in the appearance of the moor and in the wild light that alarmed her.

Suddenly she was confronted by some one ; and, looking up with a stifled cry, she found the Pensioner before her.

"I hope I hefna frichtened ye, Miss Cassilis," he said.

"No," said Coquette. "But I did not expect to meet any one."

"Ye will pe going on a veesit ; but do not go far, for it iss a stormy-looking nicht, and you will maybe get ferry wet before sat you will be home again."

"Thank you. Good-night," said Coquette.

"Good-night," said the Pensioner.

Then he turned, and said, before she was out of hearing—

"Miss Cassilis, maype now you will know if his lordship iss never coming back to Earlshope any more, not even if he will pe unable to let sa house ?"

"How should I know ?" said Coquette, suddenly struck motionless by the question.

"Oh, indeed, now," said the Pensioner, in a tone of apology. "It wass only that some o' the neebors wass seeing you speaking to Lord Earlshope this morning, and I wass thinking that very likely he wass coming back to his own house."

"I know nothing about it," said Coquette, hurrying on, with her heart overburdened with anguish and dread.

For now she knew that all the people would learn why she had run away from her uncle's house ; and they would carry to the old man the story of their having seen her talking to Lord Earlshope. But for that, the Minister might have thought her drowned or perished in some way. That was all over ; and her shame would be publicly known ; and he would have to bear it in his old age.

Down at the end of the moor, she turned to take a last look at the Manse. Far up on the height, the windows of the small building were twinkling like gleaming rubies ; the gable and the wall round the garden were of a dusky red colour ; overhead the sky was a pure, clear green, and the white sickle of a new moon was faintly visible. Never before had Airlie Manse seemed to her so lovable a place—so still, and quiet, and peaceful. And when she thought of the old man who had been like a father to her, she could see no more through the tears that came welling up into her eyes,

and she turned and continued on her way with many bitter sobs.

The wind had grown chill. The wall of cloud was slowly rising in the west, until it had shut off half of the glowing colours of the sunset ; and the evening was becoming rapidly darker. Then it seemed to Coquette that the black plain of the sea was getting strangely close to her ; and she began to grow afraid of the gathering gloom.

"Why did he not come to meet me ?" she murmured to herself. "I have no courage—no hope—when he is not near."

It grew still darker ; and yet she could not hurry her steps, for she trembled much, and was like to become faint. She had vague thoughts of returning ; and yet she went on mechanically, as if she had cast the die of her fate, and could be no more what she was.

Then the first shock of the storm fell—fell with a crash on the fir woods, and tore through them with a voice of thunder. All over now the sky was black ; and there was a whirlwind whitening the sea, the cry of which could be heard far out beyond the land. Presently came the rain in wild, fierce torrents that blew about the wet fields and raised channels of water in the roads. Coquette had no covering of any sort. In a few minutes she was drenched ; and yet she did not seem to care. She only staggered on blindly, in the frantic hope of reaching Saltcoats before the night fell. She would not go to meet Lord Earlshope. She would creep into some hovel ; and then, in the morning, send a message of repentance to her uncle ; and go away somewhere ; and never see any more the relations and friends whom she had betrayed and disgraced.

Nevertheless, she still went recklessly on, her eyes confused by the rain, her brain a prey to wild and despairing thoughts.

The storm grew in intensity. The roar of the heavy surf could now be heard far over the cry of the wind ; and the rain-clouds came across the sea in huge masses, and were blown down upon the land in hissing torrents. And still Coquette struggled on.

At last she saw before her the lights of Saltcoats. But the orange points seemed to dance before her eyes. There

was a burning in her head. And then, with a faint cry of "Uncle, uncle!" she sank down by the roadside.

Almost at the same moment there was a sound of wheels. A waggonette was stopped just in front of her, and a man jumped down.

"What is the matter wi' ye, my lass? Bless me, is it you, Miss Cassilis!"

The girl was quite insensible, however; and the man, who happened to know Miss Cassilis, lost no time in carrying her to the waggonette, and driving her to his own house, which was but a few hundred yards farther on, at the entrance to the town. There his wife and one of the servants restored Coquette to consciousness, and had her wet clothes taken off, and herself put to bed. The girl seemed already feverish, if not delirious.

"But what does she say of herself?" asked this Mr. M'Henry, when his wife came down. "How did she come to be on the way to Saltcoats a' by herself?"

"That I dinna ken," said his wife; "but the first words she spoke were, 'Take me back to Airlie, to my uncle. I will not go to Saltcoats.'"

"I would send for the Minister," said the husband, "but no human being could win up to Airlie on such a night. We will get him down in the morning."

So Coquette remained in Saltcoats that night. Under Mrs. M'Henry's treatment, the fever abated; and she lay during the darkness, and listened to the howling of the storm without. Where was Lord Earlshope?

"I hope he has gone away by himself to America, and that I will never see him again," she murmured to herself. "But I can never go back to Airlie any more."

CHAPTER LI.

A SECRET OF THE SEA.

NEXT morning there was a great commotion in Saltcoats. Despite the fierce gusts of wind that were still blowing, accompanied by squally showers of rain, numbers of people were out on the long stretch of brown sand lying south of the town. Mischief had been at work on the sea over-

night. Fragments of barrels, bits of spars, and other evidences of a wreck were being brought in by the waves ; and two smacks had even put out to look around for any larger remains of the lost vessel or vessels. Mr. M'Henry was early abroad ; for he had gone into the town to get a messenger ; and so he heard the news. At last, amid the gossiping of the neighbours, he learned that a lad had just been summoned by a certain Mrs. Kilbride to go up on an errand to Airlie, and he resolved to secure his services to carry the message.

Eventually, he met the lad on his way to the moorland village ; and then it turned out that the errand was merely to carry a letter to Miss Cassilis, at the Manse.

"But Miss Cassilis is at my house," said Mr. M'Henry. "Give me the letter, and gang you on to the Manse and ask Mr. Cassilis to come down here."

So the lad departed, and the letter was taken up and placed on the table where Coquette was to have her breakfast.

She came down, looking very pale ; and she would give no explanation of how she came to be out on such a night. She thanked them for having sent for her uncle, and sat down at the table, but ate nothing.

Then she saw the letter, and with a quick, pained flush of colour leaping to her cheeks, she took it up and opened it with trembling fingers. She read these words—

"Dearest,—I cannot exact from you the sacrifice of your life. Remorse and misery for all the rest of our years would be the penalty to both of us by your going with me to-night, even though you might put a brave face on the matter, and conceal your anguish. I cannot let you suffer that, Coquette. I will leave for America by myself ; and I will never attempt to see you again. That promise I have broken before ; but it will not be broken this time. Good-bye, Coquette. My earnest hope is that you will not come to Saltcoats to-night ; and, in that case, this letter will be forwarded to you in the morning. Forgive me, if you can, for all the suffering I have caused you. I will never forget you, my dearest love, but I will never see England or you again.

"EARLSHOPE."

There was almost a look of joy on her face.

"So I did not vex him," she thought, "by keeping him in anxiety and fear? And he has conquered too; and he will think better of himself and of me away over there, for many years to come, if he does not forget all about Airlie."

But that reference to Airlie recalled the thought of her uncle, and of his meeting with her. As the time drew near for his approach, she became more and more downcast. When, at last, the old man came into the room, where she was sitting alone, her eyes were fixed on the ground, and she dared not raise them.

He went over to her, and placed his hand on her head.

"What is all this, Catherine? Did you miss your way last night? What made ye go out on such a wild evening, without saying a word to any one?"

She replied in a low voice, which was yet studiously distinct—

"Yesterday afternoon I went away from the Manse, not intending to go back."

The Minister made a slight gesture as if some twinge had shot across his heart; and then, looking at her in a sad and grave way, he said—

"I did not think I had been unkind to you, Catherine."

This was too much for Coquette. It broke down the obduracy with which she had been vainly endeavouring to fortify herself; she fell at the feet of her uncle; and, with wild tears and sobs, told him all that had happened, and begged him to go away and leave her, for she had become a stranger and an outcast. Stunned as the old man was by these revelations, he forgot to express his sense of her guilt. He saw only before him the daughter of his own brother—a girl who had scarce a friend in the world but himself—and she was at his feet in tears, and shame, and bitter distress. He raised her, and put her head on his breast, and tried to still her sobbing.

"Catherine," he said, with his own voice broken, "you shall never be an outcast from my house, so long as you care to accept its shelter."

"But I cannot go back to Airlie—I cannot go back to Airlie!" she said, almost wildly. "I will not bring disgrace upon you, uncle; and have the people talk of me,

and blame you for taking me back. I am going away—I am not fit to go back to Airlie ! You have been very good to me—far better than I deserve ; but I cannot tell you now that I love you for all your kindness to me—for now it is a disgrace for me to speak to any one——”

“Hush, Catherine,” he said. “It is penitence, not despair, that must fill your heart. And the penitent has not to look to man for pardon, nor yet to fear what may be said of him in wrath. They that go elsewhere for forgiveness and comfort have no reason to dread the ill-tongues of their neighbours. ‘They looked unto Him, and were lightened ; and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.’ Out of all of them, Catherine. You will go back to Airlie with me, my bairn. Perhaps you do not feel at home there yet—three years is not a long time to get accustomed to a new country. I am told ye sometimes cried in thinking about France, just as the Jews in captivity did, when they said, ‘By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down ; yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.’ But maybe I have erred in not making the house lightsome enough for ye. I am an old man ; and the house is dull, perhaps. But if ye will tell me how we can make it pleasanter to ye——”

“Oh, uncle, you are breaking my heart with your kindness !” she sobbed ; “and I deserve none of it—none of it !”

It was with great difficulty that the Minister persuaded her to go back with him to the Manse. At length, however, a covered carriage was procured, and Coquette and her uncle were driven up to Airlie. The girl sat now quite silent and impassive ; only when she saw any one of the neighbours coming along the road, she seemed nervously anxious to avoid scrutiny. When they got up to the gate of the Manse, which was open, she walked quietly and sadly by her uncle’s side across the bit of garden into the house, and was then for going upstairs by herself. Her uncle prevented her.

“Ye must come and sit wi’ me for a little while, until Leezibeth has got some breakfast ready for ye.”

“I do not want anything to eat,” said Coquette ; and she seemed afraid of the sound of her own voice.

"Nevertheless," said the Minister, "I would inquire further into this matter, Catherine. It is but proper that I should know what measure of guilt falls upon that young man in endeavouring to wean away a respectable girl from her home and her friends."

Coquette drew back, with some alarm visible on her face.

"Uncle, I cannot tell you now. Some other time perhaps; but not now—not now. And you must not think him guilty, uncle—it is I who am guilty of it all—he is much better than any of you think—and now he is away to America, and no one will defend him if he is accused."

At the moment that she spoke, Lord Earlshope was beyond the reach of accusation and defence. The Saltcoats people, towards the afternoon, discovered the lid of a chest floating about, and on it was painted in white letters the word *Caroline*. Later, there came a telegram from Greenock to the effect that during the preceding night the schooner yacht *Caroline* had been run down and sunk in mid-channel, by a steamer going to Londonderry; and that, of all on board the yacht, the steamer had been able to pick up only one of the crew. And that same night the news made its way up to Airlie, and circulated through the village, and at length reached the Manse. Other rumours accompanied it. For the moment, no one dared to tell Coquette of what had happened; but none the less was her flight from the Manse connected with this terrible judgment; and even Leezibeth, struck dumb with shame and grief, had no word of protest when Andrew finished his warnings and denunciations.

"There is no healing of thy bruise," said Leezibeth to herself sadly, in thinking of Coquette. "Thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee."

CHAPTER LII.

CONSENT.

SHARP and bitter was the talk that ran through Airlie about the Minister's niece; and Coquette guessed at it; and shrank away from the people; and would fain have hidden herself from the light, as one accursed. Now indeed she knew what it was to have a ban placed upon her; and all

the old fearless consciousness of rectitude had gone ; so that she could no longer attempt to win over the people to her by patience, and sweetness, and the charm of her pleasant ways. She had fallen too far in her own esteem ; and Leezibeth began to be alarmed about the effects of that calm and reticent sadness, which had grown to be the normal expression of Coquette's once light and happy face.

It was Leezibeth who unintentionally confirmed the worst surmises of the villagers, by begging the Minister to conceal from Coquette the knowledge of Earlshope's tragic death. The Minister, anxious above all things for the girl's health, consented ; and it then became necessary to impose silence on those who were likely to meet Coquette elsewhere. So it became known that mention of Lord Earlshope was not to be made to this quiet and pale-faced girl, who still, in spite of her sadness, had something of a proud air, and looked at people with dark and troubled eyes, as though she would ask them what they thought of her.

Whether this policy of silence were advisable or not, it was certainly not very prudent to conceal from the Whaup likewise all intelligence of what had happened. He had heard of Lord Earlshope's death, of course ; and was a little surprised to be asked not to mention the matter in his letters to Coquette ; but, beyond that, he was in complete ignorance of all that had occurred at Airlie. By-and-by however rumours came to him. He began to grow uneasy. Finally, he saw Lady Drum ; and she, seeing the necessity of being explicit, told him everything in as gentle a way as she could.

"And so," he said, "my cousin is looked upon as an outcast ; and the good people of Airlie say evil things of her ; and I suppose wonder why she dares go into the church ?"

Lady Drum made no reply ; he had but described the truth.

Then the Whaup rose up, like a man, and said—

"Lady Drum, I am going down to Airlie to get Coquette to marry me ; and I will take her away from there ; and the people may talk then until their rotten tongues drop out."

Lady Drum rose too, and put her hand on his shoulder, and said gently—

“If I were a man that is what I would do. Off wi’ ye to Airlie directly, and whether she say yes or no, bring her away wi’ ye as your wife. That will mend a great many matters.”

So the Whaup went down to Airlie; and all the way in the train his heart was on fire with varied emotions of pity, and anger, and love; and his brain was busy with plans and schemes. He would have liked another year’s preparation, perhaps; but his position now with regard to Dr. Menzies was fully secured; and his income, if not a very big one, sufficient for the meantime. And when he arrived at Airlie, and reached the Manse, he made no inquiries of anybody; he went at once, in his old straightforward way, into the room where he expected to find Coquette.

Coquette was alone; and, when he opened the door, he found her eyes fixed on him.

“Oh, Coquette, you are ill!” he said, seizing both her hands and looking into her face.

“No,” she said, “I am not ill. You must not vex yourself about me—it is only I have not been much out of late.”

“Ah, I know why you have not been out,” he said; “and I am come down to put all these things straight. Coquette, you must marry me now. I won’t go away unless you go with me as my wife. That is what I have come down for.”

The girl started, as though a whip had stung her; and now a flush of shame and pain was visible in her face. She withdrew her hands from his, and said, with her eyes cast down—

“I understand why you have come. You know what they say of me. You wish to marry me to prove it is not true, and give me some better opinion of myself. That is very good of you—it is what I did expect of you—but—but I am too proud to be married in that way, and I do not wish any sacrifice from anybody.”

“What is the use of talking like that, Coquette?” he said, impetuously. “What has sacrifice or pride got to do

between you and me? Why need you care what the people at Airlie, or the people all over the world, think of you? I am going to take you away from here, Coquette. I will teach you what to think of yourself, and then you will talk no more of sacrifice. Sacrifice! If there is any sacrifice, it is in your thinking of marrying a good-for-nothing fellow like me. It is like a princess marrying a gamekeeper, or something like that; and you talk of sacrifice, and what the wretched idiots of a ridiculous little village think of you! It is absurd, Coquette! It all comes of your being shut up here, and seeing nothing, and being left to your own dreams. You are getting distorted views of everything in this dismal place. It's like conducting experiments in a vacuum: what you want is to get braced up by the actual atmosphere of the world; and learn how things work there; and discover the value that people will put upon you. What can the croaking frogs of a marsh like this know of your value, Coquette? Don't you remember how you went about Lady Drum's rooms like a queen; and everybody waited on you; and I scarcely dared come near you? Sacrifice! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Coquette!"

He spoke in the old and rapid fashion with which she used to be familiar; and his cheeks were flushed with enthusiasm; and his handsome face full of daring and confidence, as though he would have laughed at her scruples and defied the world for her sake. Perhaps he did not despise Airlie altogether as much as he said; but in the hot haste of his eloquence there was no time to be particular, or even just.

"You are as impetuous as ever; and you are as generous as ever; but you are grown no wiser," she said, looking at him in a kindly way. "For me, I have grown much older than when we went about here. I do see many things differently; and just now I must tell you what is right and best for both of us. You must not say any more about our marriage; but go up to Glasgow again, and forget all about me. If it is painful for you in the meantime, I am sorry; it will be better for you by-and-by. If you did marry a wife who had not a good name among all people—strangers as well—you might not care for a little while; but you

would remember of it afterwards ; and that would be very sorrowful for both."

With that she rose and would have passed him, and gone to the door. But he stood in her way, and confronted her, and said, with a certain formality of tone—

"You must answer me one question, Coquette, clearly and truthfully. Is all that you say merely an excuse for breaking off our marriage altogether?"

She looked surprised.

"Then you do no longer believe I speak the truth? An excuse—that is something untrue. No—I have no need of excuses."

She would have left the room then ; but he caught her hand and said—

"We are no longer children, Coquette. This is too serious a matter to be settled by a mere misunderstanding or a quarrel. I want to know if you have no other reason to postpone our marriage, or break it up altogether, than the foolish talk that prevails in the village?"

"You do forget," she said, evidently forcing herself to speak in a cold and determined manner, "that the people have some right to talk—that I did go away from the Manse, expecting——"

She could get no further. She shuddered violently ; and then, sitting down, covered her face with her hands.

"I know all about that, Coquette," he said, sadly. "It was very bitter for me to hear it——"

"And then you did come here, despising me, and yet wishing to marry me, so that I might not be too cast down. It is very generous—but you see it is impossible."

"And you mean that as a final answer, Coquette?"

She looked up into his face.

"Yes," she said, with her eyes fixed on his.

"Good-bye, then, Coquette," said he.

Anxious as was her scrutiny, she could not tell how he received this announcement ; but the tone in which he bade her good-bye went like a knife through her heart. She held out her hand and said, or was about to say, "Good-bye," when, somehow, she failed to reach his hand, and the room swam round her. Then there was a space of blank unconsciousness ; followed by the slow breathing of

returning life; and she knew that he was bathing her forehead with a handkerchief and cold water.

"You must not go away like that," she said to him, when she had somewhat recovered; "I have not many friends."

And so, sitting down beside her, he began to tell her, in a gentle and, at times, somewhat embarrassed voice, the story of his love for her, and all the plans he had formed, and how his only hope in the world was to marry her. He did not care what lay in the past; the future was to be theirs; and he would devote himself to making her once more the light-hearted Coquette of former days. He spoke to her as if afraid to disturb her even by the urgency of his affection; and while he talked in this low and earnest fashion, the girl's eyes were wistful and yet pleased, as if she were looking at the pictures he drew of a happy future for both of them, and beginning to believe in their possibility.

"People have sorrows and disappointments, you know, Coquette," he said; "and yet they forget them in great measure, for it is useless to spend a lifetime in looking back. And people do weak things and wrong things that haunt their conscience and trouble them bitterly; but even these are lightened by time. And the ill opinion of the world—that, too, gets removed by time; and all the old years, with their griefs, and their follies, and mistakes, get wiped out. You are too young to think that life has been irretrievably spoiled for you. You have got another life to set out on; and you may depend on my making it as pleasant and as happy as possible if you will only give me the chance."

"You do talk as if it was my pleasure and happiness I did think of," said Coquette. "No—that is not so. When I did say I would not marry you—it was for your sake; and then, when you seemed to be going away estranged from me, I thought I would do anything to keep you my friend. So I will now. Is that all true you say, my poor boy, about your caring only for one thing in the world? Will your life be wretched if I am not your wife? Because then I will marry you, if you like."

"Ah! do you say that, Coquette?" he said, with a flash of joy in his eyes.

There was no such joy visible on her face.

"If you could say to yourself," she added, calmly, "after a little time, 'I will keep Coquette as my friend—as my best friend—but I will marry some other one,' that would be better for you."

"It would be nothing of the kind," he said, cheerfully, "nor for you either. I am about to set myself the task of transforming you, Coquette; and in a year or two you won't know yourself!"

"In a year or two," she repeated, thoughtfully.

"You know I am a doctor now; and I am going to become your attendant physician; and I will prescribe for you, Coquette, plenty of amusement and holidays; and of course I will go with you to see that my orders are obeyed. And you will forget everything that is past and gone; for I will give you plenty to think about in managing the details of the house, you know, and arranging for people coming to see you in the evenings. And then, in the autumn-time, Coquette, you will get as brown as a berry among the valleys and the mountains of Switzerland; and if we come through France, you shall be interpreter for me, and take the tickets, you know, and complain to the landlords. All that, and ever so much more, lies before you; and what we have to do in the meantime is to get you away from this melancholy place, that has been making you wretched, and pale, and sad. Now, Coquette, tell me when I am to take you away!"

She rose with almost an expression of anguish on her face.

"Ah, not yet, not yet!" she said. "You will think over it first—perhaps you will alter your intentions."

"I shan't do anything of the kind, Coquette, unless you alter yours. Mind you, I don't mean to goad you into marrying me; and if you say now that it vexes you to think of it——"

"It does not vex me, if it will make you happy," she said.

"Then you don't wish to rescind your promise?"

"No, I do not wish it."

"And you will really become my wife, Coquette?"

She hesitated for a moment; then she said, in a low voice—

"I will be your wife if you wish it, and make you as happy as I can; but not yet, Tom—not yet; and you must not be vexed if I cannot set a time."

With that she left the room; and he flung himself into a chair to ponder over his recollections of an interview which seemed very strange and perplexing to him. "It does not vex me, if it will make you happy"—that was all he could get her to say. No expression of interest—no hopeful look—such as a girl naturally wears in talking of her coming marriage. And these moods of fear, of despondency, even bordering on wild despair, what did they mean?

"There is something altogether wrong in her relations with the people around her," he said. "She seems to labour under a burden of self-constraint and of sadness which would in another year kill a far stronger woman than she is. The place does not suit her—the people don't suit her. Everything seems to have gone wrong; and the Coquette I see bears no resemblance to the Coquette who came here a few years ago. Whatever it is that is wrong, our marriage will solve the problem, and transfer her to a new sphere and new associations."

The Whaup endeavoured to reassure himself with these anticipations; but did not quite succeed, for there was a vague doubt and anxiety hanging about his mind which would not be exorcised.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE PALE BRIDE.

THE Whaup telegraphed to Dr. Menzies for permission to remain in Airlie another couple of days, and received it. He made good use of his time. Some brief conversation he had with Leezibeth in regard to Coquette quickened his resolve. He went to his father, too, and told him of his wishes.

The old man could at first scarce credit this strange announcement. He had never even suspected his son of being particularly fond of Coquette; and now his first idea was that the Whaup, in an exceptionally chivalrous fashion, had proposed to marry her as an answer to the evil rumours that were afloat. He was soon disabused on this point. Con-

fidences at such a crisis, between father and son, are somewhat embarrassing things, particularly in most Scotch households, where reticence on all matters of the affections is the established law ; but the Whaup was too deeply in earnest to think of himself. With a good deal of rough eloquence, and even a touch of pathos here and there, he pleaded the case of Coquette and himself ; and at the end of it the Minister, who was evidently greatly disturbed, said he would consider the subject in privacy. The Whaup left his father's study with a light heart ; he knew that the Minister's deep-seated tenderness for his niece would carry the day, were all Airlie to sign a protest.

The Whaup was in the garden. His brothers were at school ; Coquette had disappeared, he knew not whither ; and he was amusing himself by whistling in reply to a blackbird hid in a holly tree. The Minister came out of the house, and gravely walked up to his son, and said—

“ You have done well in this matter. I do not say that, under other circumstances, I might not have preferred seeing you marry a wife of your own country, and one accustomed to our ways and homely fashion of living, and, above all, one having more deeply at heart our own traditions of faith. But your duty to your own kinswoman—who is suffering from the suspicions of the vulgar—must count for something——”

“ But what counts most of all, father,” said the Whaup—who would not have it thought he was conferring a favour on Coquette—“ is her own rare excellence. Where could I get a wife like her ? I don't care twopence-farthing for all that Airlie, and a dozen neighbouring parishes, may think or say of her, when I know her to be what she is. And you know what she is, father ; and the best thing you can do for her is to persuade her to be married as soon as possible—for I mean to take her away from here, and see if I cannot break that sort of dead calm that seems to have settled over her.”

“ The Manse will be very lonely without her,” said the Minister.

“ Look here, father,” said the Whaup, with a great lump rising in his throat, “ the Manse would be very lonely if she were to remain as she is much longer. Leezibeth says she

eats nothing—she never goes out—only that dull, uncomplaining monotony of sadness, and the listless days, and the reading of religious books. I know how that would end if it went on—and I don't mean to let Coquette slip out of our fingers like that—and I——”

The Whaup could say no more. He turned aside, and began to kick the gravel with his foot. The Minister put his hand on his son's shoulder and said—

“My boy, you may have more watchful eyes than mine in such matters ; and, if this be as you suspect, I will use all my influence with her, although her marriage will make a great difference to me.”

The Whaup, however, was not one to have his wooing done by proxy. During the remainder of his brief stay in Airlie, he urged Coquette with gentleness, and yet with earnestness, to fix a time for their marriage. At first she was startled by the proposal, and avoided it in a frightened way ; but at length she seemed to be won over by his representations and entreaties. He did not tell her his secret reason for thus hurrying on her departure from Airlie. It was entirely as securing his own happiness that he drew pleasant pictures of the future ; that he sat and talked to her of all she would see when they went away together ; that he endeavoured to win her consent. Then, on the last evening of his visit, they were in a corner of the hushed parlour, speaking in low tones, so as not to disturb the reading of the Minister.

“I do think it is a great misfortune that you are so fond of me,” she said, looking at him with rather wistful eyes ; “but it seems as if the world were all misfortune ; and if it will make you happy for me to marry you, I will do that ; for you have always been very kind to me ; and it is very little that I can do in return ; but if this will please you, I am glad ; and I will make you as good a wife as I can.”

That was her reply to his entreaties ; and, in token of her obedience, she took his hand and pressed it to her lips. There was something in this mute surrender that was inexpressibly touching to the Whaup ; and for a moment his conscience smote him ; and he asked himself if he were not exacting too much of a sacrifice from this tender-

hearted girl, who sat pale and resigned even in the moment of settling her marriage day.

"Coquette," said he, "am I robbing you of any other happiness that you could hope for? Is there any other prospect in life that you are secretly wishing for?"

"There is not," she said, calmly.

"None?"

"None."

"Then I will make this way of it as happy for you as I possibly can. And when, Coquette? You have never named a time yet."

"Let it be whenever you please," she answered, looking down.

The Whaup rose, and pulled himself up to his full height, as if, for the first time, he could breathe freely.

"Father," said he, "have you any objection to my going across the moor and ringing the church bell?"

The Minister looked up from his MSS.

"We are going to have a wedding in the Manse in two or three weeks," said the Whaup.

Coquette went over to the old man's chair, and knelt down by his side, and took his hand in hers.

"I shall be sorry to lose you, Catherine; but I trust you will be more cheerful and happy in your new home than you could be in this dull house."

"You have been very kind to me, uncle," she said.

With that, the Whaup went outside, and clambered up into the hayloft, and roused his brothers, who were in bed, if not all asleep.

"Get up, the whole of you!" he said; "get on your clothes, and come into the house. Look sharp—there's something for you to hear."

Leezibeth was alarmed by the invasion of the Manse which took place shortly thereafter; and came running to see what had brought the boys in at that time of night. The Whaup bade Leezibeth come into the parlour to witness the celebration; and they were introduced by the Whaup—who made a pretty speech—to their future sister-in-law; and they were ordered to give her good wishes; and then they all sat down to a sumptuous, if hastily prepared, banquet of currant bun, with a

glass of raspberry wine to each of them. Coquette was pleased ; and the tinge of colour that came to her cheeks made the Whaup think she was beginning to look like a bride. As for the boys, they expressed their delight chiefly by grinning and showing their white teeth as they ate the cake ; one of them only remarking confidentially—
“ We a’ kenned this would be the end o’t.”

The chorus of laughter which greeted this remark showed that it expressed a general sentiment. Nor was their merriment lessened when the Whaup cut off a very small piece of cake, and said to Leezibeth—

“ Take this to Andrew, with my compliments. He will be delighted with the news.”

“ Andrew or no Andrew,” said Leezibeth, who seemed rather inclined to cry out of pure sympathy ; “ ye may be a proud man on your wedding day, Maister Tammas ; and ye’ll take good care o’ her, and bring her sometimes down to Airlie, where there’s some maybe that likes her better than they can just put into words.”

And so it was that, on a fresh June morning, when the earth lay warm and silent in the bright sunshine, and the far sea was as blue and clear as the heart of a sapphire, Coquette arrayed herself in white garments. There was a great stir about the Manse that morning ; and the boys were dressed in their Sunday clothes. Flowers were all about the place ; and many innocent little surprises in the way of decoration had been planned by the Whaup himself. The Manse looked quite bright, indeed ; and Leezibeth had assumed an unwonted importance.

Coquette’s bridesmaids were the Misses Menzies ; and the Doctor was there too ; also Lady Drum and Sir Peter. According to the custom of the country, the marriage was to take place in the house ; and when they had all assembled in the largest room, the bride walked slowly in, followed by her bridesmaids.

In a church, amid a crowd of spectators, there would have been a murmur of wonder and admiration over the mysterious and pensive beauty of this delicately modelled girl, whose dark and wistful eyes seemed all the darker by reason of the snowy whiteness of her dress, and the paleness of the

pearls that shone in the splendid luxuriance of her hair. But her friends there almost forgot how beautiful she was in regarding the expression of her face—so immovably calm it was, so strangely sad. Lady Drum's heart was touched with a sudden fear. This was not the look of a bride; but the look of a woman—far too young to have any such expression—who seemed to have abandoned all hope in this world. She was not anxious, or perturbed, or pale through any special excitement or emotion; she stood throughout the long and tedious service as though she were unconscious of what was happening; and, when it was over, she received the congratulations of those around her as though she had awakened out of a dream.

The Whaup, too, noticed this look; but he had seen much of it lately; and was only rendered the more anxious to take her away and lighten her spirits by change of scene. And now that he found himself able to do so, he was full of confidence. There was no misgiving in his look. As he stood there, taller by a head than his own father, with his light-brown hair thrown carelessly back from a face bright with health and the tanning of the sun, it was apparent that the atmosphere of the great city had not had much effect on the lithe, and stalwart, and vigorous frame. And his voice was as gentle as that of a woman when he went forward, for the first time after the ceremony, and said to Coquette—

“You are not tired with standing so long, Coquette?”

She started slightly. Then—perhaps noticing that the eyes of her bridesmaids were upon her, and recollecting that she ought to wear a more cheerful expression—she smiled faintly, and said—

“You must not call me that foolish name any more. It is part of the old time when we were girl and boy together.”

“But I shall never find any name for you that I shall like better,” said he.

About an hour thereafter all preparations had been made for their departure; and the carriage was waiting for them. There was a great shaking of hands, and kissing, and leave-taking; and then, last of all, the Minister stood by the gate as Coquette came out.

“Good-bye, my dear daughter,” he said, placing his hand

on her head ; “ may He that watched over Jacob, and followed him in all his wanderings with blessings, watch over and bless you at all times and in all places ! ”

Coquette’s lips began to tremble. She had maintained her composure to the last ; but now, as she kissed her uncle, she could not say farewell in words ; and when at length she was driven away, she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

“ Coquette,” said her husband, “ are you sorry, after all, to leave Airlie ? ”

There was no answer but the sound of her sobbing.

CHAPTER LIV.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

So blinded by his exceeding happiness was the Whaup, that for a little time he could scarcely tell how the rapid change of scene and incident following their marriage was affecting Coquette’s health and spirits. He was so near her now, tending her with an extreme and anxious care, that he could not regard her critically and judge whether the old sad look was leaving her eyes. Did she not express her pleasure at the various things she saw ? Was she not so very kind and affectionate towards him that he had to protest against her little submissive attentions, and point out that it was his business to wait upon her, not hers to wait upon him ?

They went to Edinburgh first ; and then to Westmoreland ; and then to London, which was in the height of the season. And they strolled into the Park on the summer mornings and on the busier afternoons ; and sat on the little green chairs under the lime-trees ; and looked at the brilliant assemblage of people there—Cabinet Ministers, actresses, Gun-club heroes, authors, artists, and all the rank and file of fashion. So eager was the Whaup to interest his companion, that it is to be feared he made rather random shots in identifying the men and women who were cantering up and down, and conferred high official dignities on harmless country gentlemen who were but simple M.P.’s.

"There are many pretty ladies here," said Coquette, with a smile, "and yet you do not seem to know one."

"I know one who is prettier than them all put together," said the Whaup, with a glow of pride and admiration in his face; and then he added, "I say, Coquette, how did you manage to dress just like those people when you lived away down in Airlie? I think you must have sent surreptitiously to London for the dresses that used to astonish the quiet kirk-folk. Then you always had the knack of wearing a flower or a rosebud here or there, just as those ladies do, only I don't think any flowers are so becoming as those little yellow blossoms that are on a certain little white bonnet that a particular little woman I know wears at this moment."

"Ah, it is of no use," said Coquette, with a sigh of resignation. "I have tried—I have lectured—I have scolded—it is of no use. You do not know the rudeness of talking of people's dresses, and paying them rough compliments about their prettiness, and making inquiries which gentlemen have nothing to do with. I have tried to teach you all this—and you will not learn—and you do not know that you have very savage manners."

"Coquette," said he, "if you say another word I will kiss you."

"And I should not be surprised," she answered, with the slightest possible shrug. "I do not think you have any more respect for the public appearances than when you did torment the people at Airlie. You are still a boy—that is true—and I do wonder you will not sing aloud now, 'Come lasses and lads,' or some such folly. You have grown—yes. You wear respectable clothes and a hat,—but it is I who have made you dress like other people instead of the old careless way. You do know something more—but it is all got out of books. What are you different from the tall, big, coarse, rude boy who did break windows, and rob gardens, and frighten people at Airlie?"

"How am I different?" said the Whaup. "Well, I used to be bullied by a schoolmaster; but now I'm bullied by a schoolmistress; and she's the worse of the two. That's all the change I've made."

And sometimes, when they had gone on in this bantering fashion for a while, she would suddenly go up to him—if they were indoors, that is to say—and put her hand on his arm and timidly hope that she had not annoyed him. At first the Whaup laughed at the very notion of his being vexed with her, and dismissed the tender little penitent with a rebuke and a kiss; but by-and-by he grew to dread these evidences of a secret wish to please him and be submissive. He began to see how Coquette had formed some theory of what her duties were, and continually referred to this mental table of obligations rather than to her own spontaneous impulses of the moment. She seemed to consider that such and such things were required of her; and while there was something to him very touching in her mute obedience, and in her timid anticipation of his wishes, he would rather have beheld her the high-spirited Coquette of old, with her arch ways, and her fits of rebellion and independence.

“Coquette,” he said, “I will not have you wait upon me like this. It is very kind of you, you know; but it is turning the world upside down. It is my business to wait on you, and see that everything is made nice for you, and have you treated like a queen. And when you go about like that, and bother yourself to serve me, I feel as uncomfortable as the beggars in old times must have felt who had their feet washed by a pious princess. I won’t have my Coquette disguised as a waiting-maid.”

“You are very good to me,” she said.

“Nonsense!” he replied. “Who could help being good to you, Coquette? You seem to have got into your head some notion that you owe kindness and thoughtfulness to the people around you; whereas you are conferring a benefit on everybody by being merely what you are, and showing those around you what a good thing is a good woman. Why should you have this exaggerated humility? Why should you play the part of a penitent?”

Was she playing the part of a penitent? he sometimes asked himself. Had she not forgotten the events of that bygone time which seemed, to him at least, a portion of a former existence? When the Whaup and his young wife returned to Glasgow, he had more leisure to speculate on

this matter ; and he came to the conclusion that not only had she forgotten nothing, but that a sombre shadow from the past was ever present to her and hung continually over her life.

In no way did she lessen her apparent desire to be dutiful and submissive and attentive to him. The Whaup, who could have fallen at her feet and kissed them in token of the love and admiration he felt for the beautiful young life that was only now revealing to him all its hidden graces of tenderness, and purity, and rectitude, could not bear to have Coquette become his slave.

"And may I not show to you that I am grateful to you for all your kindness ever since I did come to this country ?" she said.

"Grateful to me !" he cried. "Coquette, you don't know your own value !"

"But if it pleases me to be your servant ?" she said.

"It does not please me," he retorted ; "and I won't have it."

"Voyez un peu ce tyran !" said Coquette, and the Whaup laughed and gave in.

It may be supposed that that was not a very unhappy household in which the only ground of quarrel between husband and wife was as to which should be the more kind and attentive to the other. And indeed, to all outward semblance, the Whaup was the luckiest of men ; and his friends who did not envy him rejoiced at his good fortune ; and bore unanimous testimony to the sweetness and gentleness and courtesy of the small lady who received them at his house. It was noticed, it is true, that she was very quiet and reserved at times ; and that occasionally, when she had somehow withdrawn out of the parlour circle, silent and *distracte*, her husband would follow her with anxious looks, and would even go to her side and endeavour to wean her back into the common talk. As for his affection for her, and pride in her rare beauty and accomplishments, and devotion to her, all were the subject of admiration and encomium among the women of many households. He never sought to conceal his sentiments on that score. On the rare occasions when he visited a friend's house without her, all his talk was of Coquette, and her

goodness, and her gentle ways. Then he endeavoured to draw around her as many friends as possible, so that their society might partly supply the void caused by his professional absences ; but Coquette did not care for new acquaintances, and declared she had always plenty of occupation for herself while he was away, and did not wish the distraction of visits.

Down in the old Manse of Airlie the Minister heard of his son and of Coquette through various channels ; and he was rejoiced beyond measure. Lady Drum was so affected by her own description of the happiness of these two young people, that in the middle of her narration she burst into tears ; and a sort of sob at the door might have let the Minister know that Leezibeth had been listening. The Minister, indeed, paid a brief visit to Glasgow some few weeks after Coquette's return, and was quite overwhelmed by the affectionate attentions of his daughter-in-law.

"Surely," he said to Lady Drum, the evening before he set out for home again, "surely the Lord has blessed this house. It has never been my good fortune to dwell under a roof that seemed to look down on so much of kindness, and charitable thoughts, and well-doing ; and it would ill become me not to say how much of this I attribute to her who is now more than ever a daughter to me."

"When I come to speak of her," said Lady Drum, "and of the way she orders the house, and of her kindness to every one around her, and of her conduct towards her husband, I am fair at a loss for words."

The bruit of all these things reached even down to Airlie ; and the Schoolmaster was at length induced, being in Glasgow on a certain occasion, to call on the Minister's son. The Whaup received his ancient enemy with royal magnanimity ; compelled him to stop the night at his house ; gave him as much toddy as was good for an elder ; while Coquette, at her husband's request, left her fancy-work and played for them some old Scotch airs. By-and-by she left them to themselves ; and, warmed with the whisky, the Schoolmaster imparted a solemn and mysterious secret to his remaining companion.

"You are a young man, sir, and have no knowledge, or,

as I may term it, experience, of the great and wonderful power of public opinion. Nor yet, considering your opportunities, is it likely, or, as one might say, probable, that ye pay sufficient deference to the reputation that your neebors may accord ye. Nevertheless, sir, reputation is a man's public life, as his own breath is his private life. Now, I will not conceal from ye, Mr. Thomas, that evil apprehensions have been entertained, or even, one might say, expressed, in your native place, regarding one who holds an important position as regards your welfare——"

With which the Whaup bounced up from his chair.

"Look here!" said he. "Do you mean my wife, Mr. Gillespie? Don't think I care a rap for the drivelling nonsense that all the old women in Airlie may talk; but if a man mentions anything of the kind to me, by heavens, I'll throw him out of the window!"

"Bless me!" cried the Schoolmaster, also rising, and putting his hands before him as if to defend himself. "What's the use o' such violence? I meant no harm. On the contrary, I was going to say, man, that it would be my bounden duty when I get back to Airlie to set my face against all such reports, and testify to the great pleasure I have experienced in seeing ye mated wi' such a worthy, and amiable, and——"

Here the Schoolmaster's encomium was cut short by the entrance of Coquette herself, who had returned for something she had forgotten; and a more acute observer might have noticed that no sooner was her footfall heard at the door than all the anger fled from the Whaup's face, and he only laughed at Mr. Gillespie's protestations of innocence.

"You must forgive me," said the Whaup, good-naturedly. "You know, I married one of the daughters of Heth; and so I had to expect that the good folks at Airlie would be deeply grieved."

"A daughter of Heth!" said Mr. Gillespie. "Indeed, I remember that grumbling body, Andrew Bogue, makin' use o' some such expression on the very day ye were married; but if the daughters o' Heth were such as she is, Rebekah need not have put herself about, or, in other words, been so apprehensive of her son's future."

And the Schoolmaster was as good as his word ; and took down to Airlie such a description of the Whaup and his bride as became a subject of talk in the village for many a day. And so the patience and the gentleness of Coquette bore their natural fruit, and all men began to say all good things of her.

There was one man only who regarded this marriage with doubt, and sometimes with actual fear, who was less sure than all the others that Coquette was happy, and who looked to the future with an anxious dread. That one man was the Whaup himself. With a slow and sad certainty, the truth dawned on him that he had not yet won Coquette's love ; that he was powerless to make her forget that she had married him in order to please him ; and that, behind all her affectionate and friendly demonstrations towards himself, there lay over her a weight of despair. The discovery caused him no paroxysm of grief, for it was made gradually ; but in time it occupied his constant thoughts, and became the dark shadow of his life. For how was he to remove this barrier that stood between himself and Coquette ? The great yearning of love he felt towards her was powerless to awaken any response but that mute, animal-like faithfulness and kindness that dwelt in her eyes whenever she regarded him. And it was for her, rather than for himself, that he was troubled. He had hurried on the marriage, hoping a change of scene and of interest would break in on the monotony of sadness that was evidently beginning to tell on the girl's health. He had hoped, too, that he would soon win her over to himself by cutting her away from those old associations. What was the result ? He looked at the pale and calm face, and dared not confess to himself all that he feared.

One evening, entering suddenly, he saw that she tried to avoid him and get out of the room. He playfully intercepted her, and found, to his astonishment, that she had been crying.

"What is the matter, Coquette ?" he said.

"Nothing," she answered. "I was sitting by myself—and thinking, that is all."

He took both her hands in his, and said, with an infinite sadness in his look—

“Do you know, Coquette, that for some time back I have been thinking that our marriage has made you miserable.”

“Ah, do not say that!” she said, piteously looking up in his face. “I am not miserable if it has made you happy.”

“And do you think I can be happy when I see you trying to put a good face on your wretchedness, and yet with your eyes apparently looking on the next world all the time? Coquette, this is driving me mad. What can I do to make you happy? Why are you miserable? Won’t you tell me? You know I won’t be angry, whatever it is. Is there nothing we can do to bring you back to the old Coquette, that used to be so bright and cheerful? Coquette, to look at you going about from day to day in that sad and resigned way, never complaining, and always pretending to be quite content—I can’t bear it, my darling.”

“You must not think that I am miserable,” she said, very gently, and then she left the room. He looked after her for a moment; then he sank into a chair; and covered his face with his hands.

CHAPTER LV.

THE CHUCHYARD ON THE MOOR.

AT last it occurred to him that Coquette ought to be told of Lord Earlishope’s death. He would not confess to himself the reason why such a thought arose in his mind; but endeavoured, on the contrary, to persuade himself that there was no further need for holding back that old secret. He and Coquette were at Airlie at the time, on their first visit after their marriage. The Minister was anxious to see his daughter-in-law; and the Whaup, while she stayed there, would take occasional runs down. So Coquette was staying at the Manse.

“I cannot get her to go out as she used to do,” said the Minister, the first time the Whaup arrived from Glasgow. “She seems better pleased to sit at the window by herself and look over the moor; and Leezibeth tells me she is in very low spirits, and does not look particularly well. It is a pity she dislikes going out; it is with difficulty I can get her even into the garden; and once or twice she has shown

a great repugnance to going anywhere near Earlshope, so you must not propose to go in that direction in asking her to accompany you."

Then the Whaup said, with averted eyes: "You know she is not aware of Lord Earlshope having been drowned, and she may be afraid of meeting him. Suppose we tell her of what happened to the yacht?"

"I am of opinion it would be most advisable," said the Minister.

The Whaup got Coquette to go out and sit in the garden; and there, while they were by themselves, he gently told her of the loss of the *Caroline*. The girl did not speak nor stir; only she was very pale; and he noticed that her hand was tightly clenched on the arm of the wooden seat. By-and-by she rose and said—

"I should like to walk down to Saltcoats, if you will come."

"To Saltcoats!" said her husband. "You are not strong enough to walk all that way and back, Coquette."

"Very well," she said, submissively.

"But if you very much want to go we could drive, you know," said he.

"Yes, I should like to go," she said.

So the Whaup, late as it was in the afternoon, got out the dog-cart, and drove her away to the old-fashioned little seaport town which they had together visited in bygone years. He put the horse up at the very inn that he and Coquette had visited; and then he asked her if she wished to go for a stroll through the place. Her slightest wish was a command to him. They went out together; and insensibly she led him down to the long bay of brown sand on which a heavy surf was now breaking. She had spoken but little; her eyes were wistful and absent; and she seemed to be listening to the sound of the waves.

"It blows too roughly here, Coquette," said he. "You won't go down on the beach?"

"No," she said. "Here I can see more, and hear more."

For a considerable time she stood and looked far over the heaving plain of water, which was of a dark green colour, under the cloudy evening sky. And then she shuddered slightly, and turned to go away.

"You are not vexed with me for coming?" she said. "And you know why I did come."

"I am not vexed with anything you do, Coquette," he answered her.

"It is his grave," she said, looking once more over the wild waste of waters. "It is a terrible grave; for there are voices in it, and cries, like drowning people; and yet one man out there would go down and down, and you would hear no voice. I am afraid of the sea."

"Coquette," he said, "why do you tremble so? You must come away directly, or you will catch cold—the wind blows so fiercely here."

But on their way back to Airlie, this trembling had increased to violent fits of shuddering; and then all at once Coquette said faintly—

"I do feel that I should wish to be still and go to sleep. Will you put me down by the roadside, and leave me there awhile, and you can go on to Airlie?"

"Why, do you know what you are saying, Coquette? Go on to Airlie, and leave you here?"

She did not answer him; and he urged on the pony with all speed, until at length they reached the Manse.

"Tom," she said, "I think you must carry me in."

He lifted her down from the vehicle, and carried her like a child into the house; and then, when Leezibeth brought a light, he uttered a slight cry on finding that Coquette was insensible. But presently life returned to her, and a quick and flushed colour came to her face. She was rapidly got to bed; and the Minister, who had a vivid recollection of the feverish attack from which she had suffered in the north, proposed that a doctor from Saltcoats should be sent for.

"And I will telegraph to Dr. Menzies," said the Whaup, scarcely knowing what he said, only possessed by some wild notion that he would form a league to drive off this subtle enemy that had approached Coquette.

All that followed that memorable evening was a dream to him. He knew, because he was told, and because he himself could see, that the fever was laying a deeper and deeper hold on a system which was dangerously weak. Day after day he went about the house; and, as Coquette got worse, he

scarcely realised it. It was to him as though a weight out of the sky were crushing down the world, as if all things were slowly sinking into darkness. He was not excited, nor wild with grief ; but he sat and watched Coquette's eyes ; and seemed not to know the people who came into the room, or whom he met on the stairs.

The girl, in her delirium, had violent paroxysms of terror and shuddering, in which she seemed to see a storm rising around her, and waves threatening to overwhelm her ; and then no one could soothe her like her husband. His mere presence seemed enough ; for the old instinct of obedience still remained with her ; and she became submissively quiet and silent in answer to his gentle entreaties.

"You are very good to me," she murmured absently to him one evening, half-recognising him although the delirium had not left her, "and I cannot thank you for it, but my mamma will do that when you come up to our house. We shall not stop in this country always?—when mamma is waiting for me in the garden, just over the river, you know. . . . And she has not seen you, but I will take you up to her, and say you have been very, very kind to me. I wish we could be there soon, for I am tired, and I do think this country is very dark, and the sea is so dreadful round about it—it goes round about it like a snake, that hisses, and raises its fierce head, and it has a white crest on its head and eyes of fire, and you see them glaring in the night-time. But one can get away from it ; and hide close and quiet in the churchyard on the moor—yes, yes ; and when you come in, Tom, by the small gate, you must listen, and whisper 'Coquette,' you know, just as you used to do when I lay on the sofa, and you wished to see if I were awake ; and—and—if I cannot speak to you, it will be very hard, but I shall know you have brought me some flowers. And you will say to yourself, 'My poor Coquette would thank me if she could.'"

He laid his hand on her white fingers. He could not speak.

By-and-by the delirium left, and the fever abated ; but the frail system had been shattered, and all around saw that she was slowly sinking. One night she beckoned her husband to come nearer, and he went to her, and took her thin hand in his.

"Am I going to die, Tom?" she asked, in a scarcely audible voice; and when, in answer, he only looked at her sad eyes, she said, "I am not sorry. It will be better for you and for every one. You will forgive me for all that happened at Airlie when you think of me in after-times; and you will not blame me because I could not make your life more happy to you—it was all a misfortune, my coming to this country——"

"Coquette, Coquette!" he said, beside himself with grief, "if you are going to die, I will go with you too—see, I will hold your hand, and when the gates are open, I will not let you go—I will go with you, Coquette!"

Scarce half an hour afterwards, the gates were opened, and she so quietly and silently passed through, that he only of all in the room knew that Coquette had gone away from them and bidden a last farewell to Airlie. They were startled to see him fling his arms in the air; and then as he sank down by the bed a low cry broke from his lips—"So near—so near! and I cannot go with her too!"

One day, in the early spring-time, you might have seen a man in the prime of youth and strength—yet with a strangely worn look on his face—enter the small churchyard on Airlie moor. He walked gently on, as if fearing to disturb the silence of the place; and at last he stood by the side of a grave on which were many spring flowers—snowdrops, and violets, and white crocuses. He, too, had some flowers in his hand; and he put them at the foot of the grave; and there were tears running down his face.

"These are for my Coquette," he said; "but she cannot hear me any more."

For a little while he lingered by the grave, and then he turned. And, lo! all around him was the fair and shining country that she had often looked on; and far away before him lay the sea, as blue and as still as on the morning when he and Coquette were married. How bright and beautiful was the world that thus lay under the clear sunshine, with all its thousand activities busily working, and its men and women joyously thinking of to-morrow, as if to-morrow were to be better than to-day. To him all the light and joy of the universe seemed to be buried in the little grave

beside him ; there would never come any morrow that could bring him back the wonder of the days that were. He walked to the gate of the churchyard, and, leaning on it, looked wistfully over the azure plain in which the mountains of Arran were mirrored.

“ Why have they taken away from us the old dreams ? ” he said to himself, while his eyes were wet with bitter tears. “ If one could only believe, as in the old time, that Heaven was a fair and happy island lying far out in that western sea, how gladly would I go away in a boat, and try to find my Coquette ! Only to think that some day I might see the land before me, and Coquette coming down to the shore, with her face grown wonderful and calm, and her gentle eyes full of joy and of welcome. Only to believe that—only to look forward to that—would be enough ; and if in the night-time a storm came, and I was sunk in the darkness, what matter, if I had been hoping to the last that I should see my Coquette ? ”

THE END.

RETURN CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT

TO →

~~202 Main Library~~

NRLP

LOAN PERIOD 1

2

3

HOME USE

4

5

6

ALL BOOKS MAY BE RECALLED AFTER 7 DAYS

Renewals and Recharges may be made 4 days prior to the due date.

Books may be Renewed by calling 642-3405

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

SENT ON 11

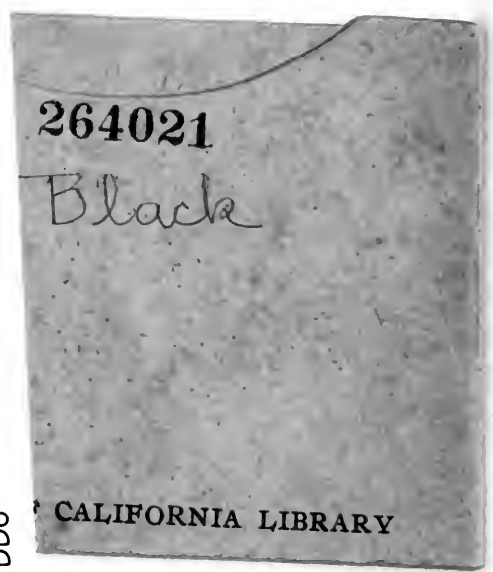
JAN 15 1996

U.C. LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
BERKELEY, CA 94720

DS

FORM NO. DD6



264021

Black

CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

